MAY

Weird Tales

25¢

. . . Strange whisperings and rustling in the willows

"Whisper Water"

LEAH BODINE DRAKE

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Demonstrations win new customers. Men with **DURACLEAN** Dealerships find REPEAT and VOLUNTARY orders become a major source of income. Customers are not merely satisfied—many are enthused with results and tell their *friends and neighbors. Furniture and department* stores and interior decorators turn over cleaning and mothproofing to **DURACLEAN** Dealers. We show you 27 ways to get new customers.

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What Dealers Say

W. *Lookiebill:* We've had 20 years of pleasant dealings. I'm 65 but am setting my sights for 20 more years.

Gerald Merriman: This made me $700 cleaning with only 13 working days.

P. Friedinger: 70% of our business is repeat . . . also get business from reference of satisfied customers.

A. Ullman: It is encouraging that every demonstration has been a sale.

L. Ellsworth: Your advertising program certainly paid dividends for me.

M. Lassanske: My original investment *was returned in about two months.* I am not sorry in any way that I started my business "on a shoe string."

R. Kimbrough: Finished First White House of Confederacy and I am to Duraclean the Governor's Mansion.

C. Lombardo: I have been in some of the finest homes. Have 100% satisfaction.

Margarette Turner: Took in $106 that week and worked about 15 or 18 hours.

L. Johnson: Every customer passes out "orchids" as we finish the job and gives us names of friends to see. That is the way this business develops—each customer leads to 3 or 4 more.

H. Satterfield: Duracleaned chair for largest department store and got order for 60 to 75 chairs, couches & davenports.

Q. Corbett (Canada): Several hundred *dollars in jobs lined up from canvassing.*

P. Sheptak: I believe this (national advertising) will improve our business as we are getting 4 and 5 calls daily.

P. D. Friedinger: Has a big mothproof business last year; one job was $322.25

C. L. Smith: Again 1 day's work, 8 hours, totaling over $100.00 for my helper and I which isn't bad for a country boy like me. I myself do not have any unusual abilities, only this. I'm equipped with the best cleaning service in the field and get well paid for my work

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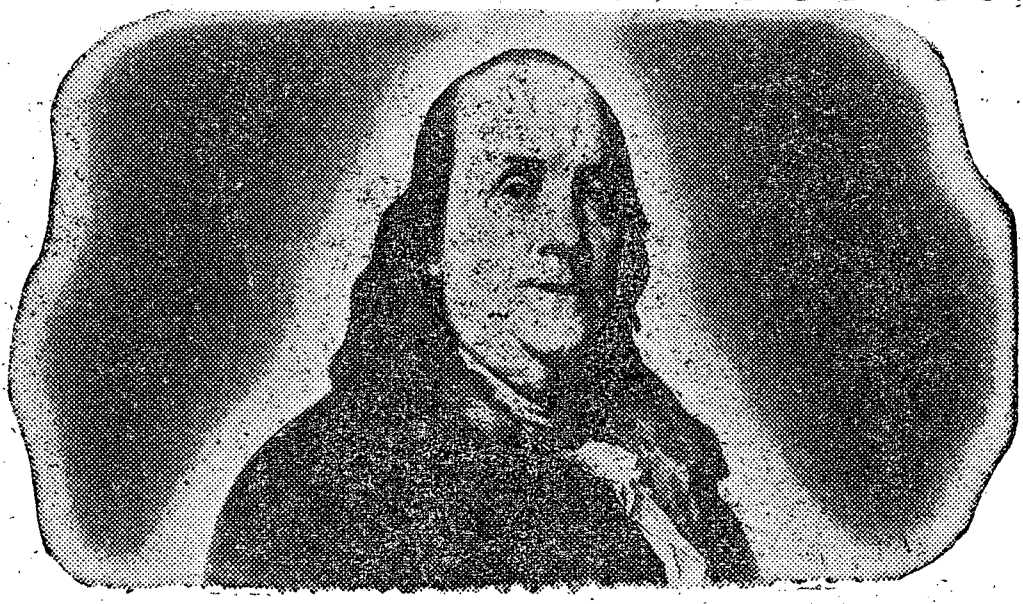
WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

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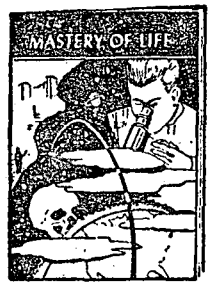

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Weird Tales

MAY, 1953 Cover by Joseph Eberle

WHISPER WATER . . . . . Leah Bodine Drake 6
It seems to whisper . . . especially at sundown when the night hawks are flying and the breeze makes spooky rustlings in the willows.

THE LIVING EYES . . . . . Justin Dowling 16
They protruded from their sockets as if on sticks; they writhed, expanded, twitched as she blinked. They were themselves alive!

I'LL BE BACK . . . . . David Eynon 20
That was what all the G. I.'s said in France—I'll be back. Back how many years one was led to wonder?

STRANGE HARVEST (A novelette) . . . . . Donald Wandrei 26
A whole orchard moved itself to a new location; potatoes sank instead of being dug up; melons receded from the pickers—what sort of agricultural report would cover all this?

MORTHYLLA . . . . . Clark Ashton Smith 41
. . . after his death, he forgot that he had died.

A CORNER FOR LUCIA . . . . . August Derleth 47
Lucia dropped out of sight right into a hole—not a hole in the pavement, but a hole in space.

A FOG WAS BLOWING (Verse) . . . . . Stanton A. Coblentz 54

BETWEEN TWO DREAMS (A novelette) . . . . . Felix Marti Ibanez 56
The dream was taking on most abhorrent aspects. I was no longer a spectator, but a participant, and I didn't like it at all.

THE VENGEANCE OF KALI MAI . . . . . Garnett Radcliffe 73
The temple had become a playground for monkeys. How easy it would be to remove the necklace of blood-red stones.

REQUIEM FOR A SINNER (Verse) . . . . . Pauline Booker 77

MANDRAKE . . . . . Adam Hull Shirk 78
. . . one plant concerning which superstition is almost universal. Could it have a modern application?
(Copyright 1923 by Rural Publishing Company)

WIFE OF THE DRAGON-FLY . . . . . Paul Ernst 83
There was no shelter for an eavesdropper for fifty feet about them, yet their conversation was reported word for word.
(Copyright 1936 by Popular Fiction Publishing Company)

THE EYRIE 4

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A. Vol. 45, No. 2

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

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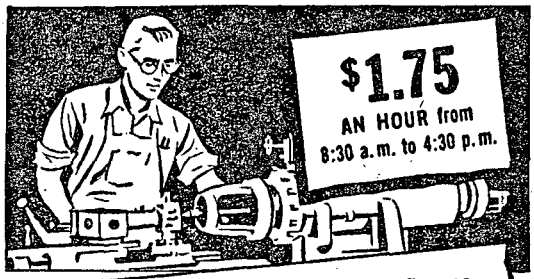
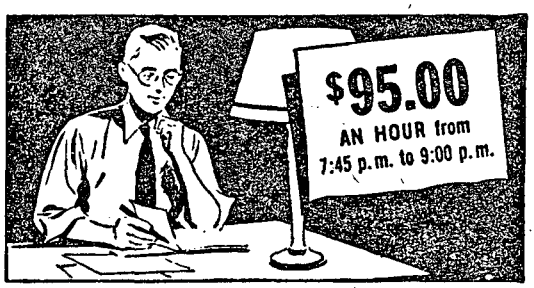
BOOST YOUR EARNING POWER DURING THE HOURS THAT COUNT





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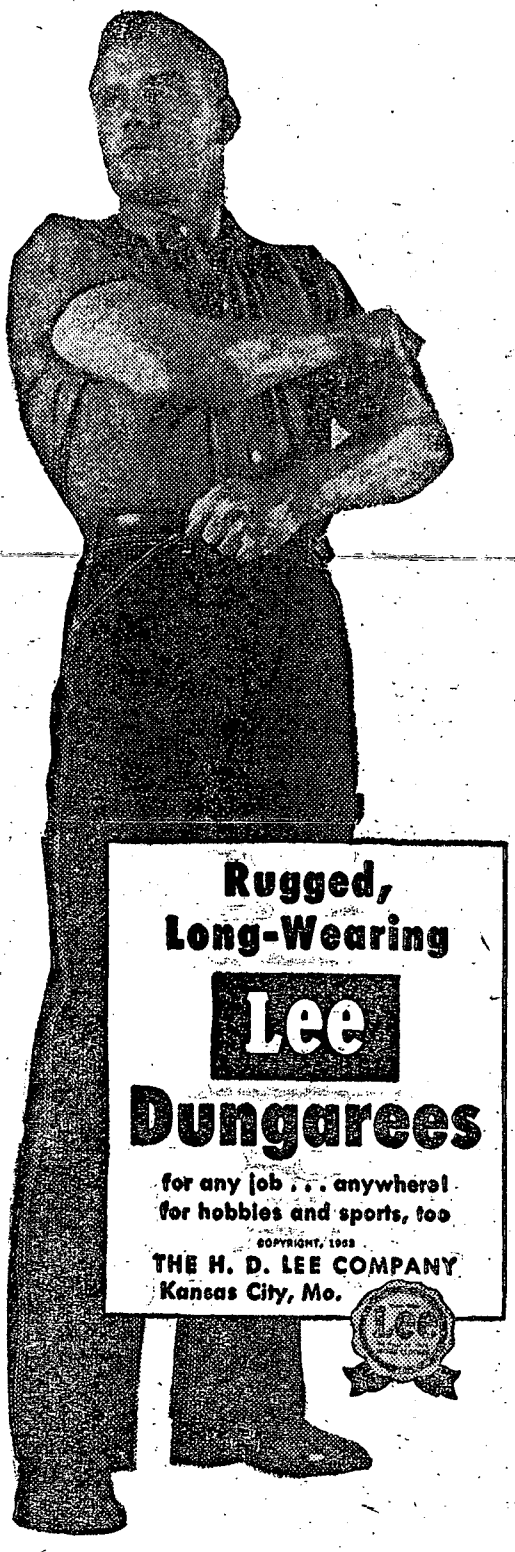

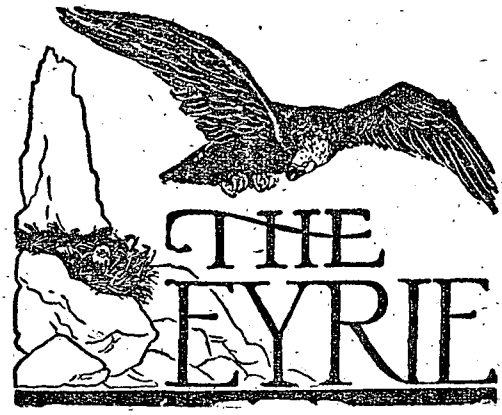

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

It would be greatly to the benefit of WEIRD TALES *if the energy used in the current letter column debate on the literary merit of HPL could be channeled into a campaign for new readers and subscribers.*

Loyal readers of this oldest and greatest of the fantasy magazines should not need the reminder that increased circulation means higher wordage rates for authors, resulting higher quality of the stories and eventually a neater-appearing publication.

To me, there is something ominous in the fact that WT remains a bi-monthly and is forced to use reprints—(excellent though they may be) in an era of comparative prosperity for imaginative literature.

Clearly the blame does not lie with the editor. It is obvious that an attempt is being made to keep the literary quality at a high level, and the art work has been absolutely superb.

The great tradition of WEIRD TALES *deserves its continuance among the leaders in the field. Its very presence in the field is necessary for the preservation of fantasy literature. Too many of the present-day magazines and their editors sneer at the memory and literary styles of Merritt, Whitehead, Howard and Lovecraft.*

Nothing, in a manner of speaking, is "sacred" to the contemporary reviewer. Every story should either have a scientific explanation or be an out-and-out farce. Adventure, romance, or more than two con-

(*Continued on page 93*)

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WHISPER WATER

by Leah Bodine Drake

I ALWAYS said there was something different about Dan Redwine.

The Redwines had the big farm down the pike a piece from us and Dan was the only boy. He was a little, wispy fellow, with big gray eyes that always seemed to see a sight more than anybody else and he never was a talker. But he was happy-hearted and a right clever lad, and just about the best friend I ever had. Dan was a hard worker, too, for all his puny frame. Old Mr. Red-

. . . a kind of wispy idea that something heathen and powerful from old days lived along our branch.

Heading by Joseph Eberle

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wine was poorly, and Miz' Redwine was a slipshod, oh-let-it-rest woman, who rocked more than she worked. There were two Redwine girls, but they married early and moved into foreign parts, two-three counties away.

So it was up to Dan to bear a man's burdens, even in his youthful days. Many's the time I've wanted him to go hunting or to a play-party over in Hurdsville, and he'd say No, he had to mend a fence, or look for a cow that had strayed, or hoe the burley, or what-all. Yessir boss, Dan was a drivin' boy.

Maybe I'd better say who I am, although I have little to do with the story. I'm Jed Clay Bullion, and it was my Uncle Wade Bullion who was Sheriff of Tatum county the time we had those terrible goings-on that I will try to tell of. Uncle Wade has it all writ down and signed, what was a real, sure-enough death-bed confession, and I saw some and heard a lot of what went on, my own self.

Like I said, Dan Redwine worked hard, but he was still just a tad, time my story begins. He liked to prank around like other young ones, and he liked to fish, I mind, better than anything else. When he had the time he'd get his dad's ol' fishing pole and go down to a pretty little branch that cuts through Redwine land, named Whisper Water.

Whisper Water is well-called. I don't just mean because it seems to whisper to you when you walk by its banks, 'specially at sundown when the nighthawks are flying and the breeze makes spooky rustlings in the willows. I mean, there's always been whispers *about* it—mostly among the old folks—how a man might see and hear more than ripples and wind and fish jumping or a 'coon washing its dinner in those deep, brown waters. There used to be Red Indians around here, they say, in the old days—Shawnee, and Kickapoo and Cherokee. I reckon that any place where *they've* been will always have queer tales told of it. They never camped here permanent, just used to come down here for hunting and their little wars, and then go back again across the river.

But they slipped in and out of the state enough to leave shadows, so to speak, of their outlandish spooks and spirits, and there was a kind of wispy idea that something from those old times, something heathen and powerful, lived in our branch. Nobody had ever described it, and 'twasn't known if it were good or bad, but whatever lived in Whisper Water never seemed to trouble its mind over humans. That is, never till once . . . but I'm 'way ahead of my story.

DAN liked to hang around Whisper Water, particularly where it bulged out into a kind of little pool near an enormous old willow-tree. Many's the swim we've had together in that-there little pool. Dan liked to sit under that tree and fish, and play on a mouth-harp that he always carried in his jeans. He could play right good, too—"Sourwood Mountain" and "Hand Me Down My Walking Cane" and "Lord Lovell He Stood By His Castle Wall." But his favorite was the one that begins, "Have you seen my true-love with the coal-black hair?" Over and over, while the willow swayed in the summer wind and the catfish nibbled his line, he'd play that sweet, sad piece.

Dan took a kind of personal pride in that branch. Whisper Pool was just below the Redwine house a ways, and Redwine property so to speak. He used to keep it cleaned out good. You know how some folks in the country are—we incline towards using a branch-bed as a kind of dumpheap. It's against the law now, I reckon, but back when Dan and I were young lads there wasn't any such law, or if there was nobody in Tatum county had heard of it. But Dan saw to it that no old blowed-out tires or tin cans were cast into his part of Whisper, and he always tidied up after any picnickers who drove in here from foreign parts. Dan was fair silly about that stream, but whatever lived in it appreciated his care, because the way the fish bit for Dan was a pure wonder!

I asked him about his amazing luck, once.

Dan seemed kind of embarrassed. He muttered something about "an agreement with a brown lady."

"Brown lady?" I said scornful. I was at the scornful age then, around twelve or thirteen. "Boy, are you crazy? Don't nobody live around here except you-all and Old Man Tuttle up on the hill. *What* brown lady?"

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Dan didn't answer and kept on fixing a worm on his line, pretending like he didn't hear me.

"Shoo," I went on, "she must have been one of those picnickers that worry you so. She was just a picnicker, having fun with you. Some of those foreign ladies are awful sassy."

But Dan shook his head and said No, wasn't any city-lady. That's all I could get out of him, because when it came to Whisper Water he always got mum-mouthed, for all we were friends.

Well, we got older and started going to the dances in Hurdsville and beauing the girls around and I guess Dan sort of forgot about "brown ladies," for pretty soon he was courting Honeybird Sanders.

Everyone to his own taste, is what I thought when Dan took to Honeybird. I'll admit she was a fair sight in those days—tumbled red hair, snappy blue eyes and smart and sassy. But man, was she a tartar! She could flare up over a trifle, and then her blue eyes would spark and her mouth tighten up, and she'd look like she could kill you. Besides that, she had too much of a roving eye to suit me. But Dan married up with her. Or rather, Honeybird married *him,* being a mighty purposeful woman when she wanted something. At that time she wanted Dan Redwine, and the Redwine land, maybe, it belonging to him now that his dad and ma had died.

A funny thing happened at the wedding. There was a right smart lot turned out for it, and I thought I knew most everybody present. But there seemed to be one person I couldn't quite place. It looked like a woman, but I never could see her real plain. She was always just slipping away behind somebody, or just beyond the corner of my eye, and when I'd turn to look at her she'd be a little way out of my range still. It was the aggravatingest thing! I got the idea that she was small and dark and dressed kind of odd, in what looked like old-fashioned, but handsome greeny stuff—like fine, store-bought velvet, maybe. I also thought she was barefoot, and I recall saying to myself, "Well, Missy, seems like you could have wore your shoes to a wedding!"

Nobody else seemed to notice her, and as she didn't go into the church with the rest, I forgot about her. I thought I saw Dan look around kind of sharp-like, once or twice, like you'll do when someone comes up behind and speaks suddenly to you. But who it was, if anybody, I never did see.

The wedding party went off fine and dandy, and Dan and Honeybird settled down at his place and for a while things went along peaceable enough.

Peaceable for Honeybird, that is, but maybe not so much for Dan. Honeybird's temper didn't quiet down any, and her tongue was still razor-sharp. She had a rough hand with beasts, too. I mind one time Dan brought home a baby muskrat whose mother had died in a trap. He cared for it and petted it, just like he did all small, helpless things. Honeybird got the rifle down when he was over in Hurdsville, and killed it. But instead of being merciful and shooting it, she beat its head in with the butt! She told Dan it had bit her, but I don't think he believed her, because he never again brought any young creatures to the house.

THE worse she got, the more he took to going off by himself to Whisper Water and sitting by the willow to fish or just play his mouth-harp and brood, where it was quiet and peaceful. He had to practically sneak off, though, as Honeybird had a powerful dislike for that branch. It got to be more—it was a kind of nameless fear with her.

She showed this one day when the Redwines were walking home from church with me and my Sally. When we turned off the pike to take the short cut through the field by Whisper Water she stopped dead.

"You-all can go back along the branch," she said, "but I'm staying on the pike."

"Whatever for, Birdie?" said my Sally. "It's a slight hotter and dustier."

"Hot or dusty or not—the last time I come along Whisper that big willow hit me in the face. All right, *laugh*!" she snaps, although nobody had. "A great, long willow-wand reared back and smacked me right square across my face and left a big red welt. My laws, it felt just like some living person had slapped me!"

"All right, Birdie girl, we'll go with you

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along the pike," said Dan, looking, I thought, a little worried.

We ought to have seen that—here was a token, but human beings are funny. They hate to admit that there are things in this world that are more, or less, than human, with powers for good or ill, according to whether it's good or ill that's done them by men. Honeybird never would walk by the branch again, though, and knowing what I do now, I can't blame her.

She and Dan had been married now about ten years. I reckon it got lonely for her up at the Redwine place, Dan being such a quiet man, and there never being any children. If she'd had a passel of young ones to busy her mind things might have been different. But she never did, and sometimes I wonder if Whisper Water was to blame—but maybe I'm fanciful.

ANYWAY, things perked up when some oilmen came down here and leased some of Dan's land. Pretty soon they moved in a big rig, with cable-tools, and the contractor—Mr. Bill Brady, his name was—brought in a crew and they started drilling. Two of the boys located themselves in Hurdsville and drove to work every day around noon. But Mr. Brady, who helped drill, and his tooldresser got themselves fixed at the house for room and board. They were going to run tower (as they called it) at night, and it was a sight handier to live on the place.

Mr. Brady was a youngish man, pleasant-spoken if a mite school teacherish, and no great shakes for looks. But his tooldresser, that Foley, was a humdinger!

Big, blackeyed and rowdydow, always laughing and pranking and shining up to the girls! He was the sweet-talkingest man I ever did see, poor soul! He just naturally made a set for Honeybird, and she was smitten with him from the start. After living alone with slow-spoken Dan for ten years, she was pleased and flattered to have such a big, good-looking man like Foley Mathers shine up to her. That was the toolie's name—Foley Mathers. Lard, how can I forget it?

Right away Honeybird smartened up like she hadn't since her wedding. She put herself out to cook better than since the honeymoon. Sweet potato pie and her best peach preserves on the table every day! She even took to curling her hair again and pinning on a ribbon or two, and when Honeybird set her mind to it, she was a right taking woman.

Foley just ate it up. Lots of time when I was there, around noon, when Mr. Brady and him would come off tower, Foley'd come busting in the kitchen roaring, "Where Miss Honeybird? Where's that good-looking landlady of mine?" and she'd giggle and prime herself like a girl.

Working half the night like they did, Mr. Brady and Mathers slept a good piece of the afternoon. I hate to scandalize anybody's name, especially when they're dead and gone, but seems like Foley wasn't sleeping all that time.

Mr. Brady had the spare room to himself, and he was a little hard of hearing, so what went on when Dan was down in the low ground at the corn, or hoeing the burley by the woodlot will never now be rightly known to man. But it's certain there was enough between Foley and Dan's wife to make her jealous of other women.

One noon I was over at Redwines' returning a harrow I'd borrowed. Mr. Brady was in the kitchen unlacing his field-boots, when Mathers came in the back shed. He started washing up, but pretty soon he stuck his head around the door and said, "Who's that cute little black-eyed gal around here, wears her hair in two big braids over her chest?"

"No *grown* woman'd be silly enough to wear her hair like that," snaps Honeybird, "nobody but a Red Indian, that is, and there've been none of them kind around here for many enduring years, that's certain."

"Say!" bawls Foley, "Come to think of it, that's just what she looked like—a cute little Indian squaw, like I've seen out in Oklahoma, time I was working on a well near Nowata."

He stepped into the kitchen. "Mean, too, like an Indian woman can get. Man, did she give me a dirty look as she passed me! Like she's ready to scalp my hair off. Br-r-r!"

"What had you done, Mathers?" asked

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Mr. Brady, in a casual way. "Make a pass at her?"

"Why, Mr. Brady, you know I'm as innocent as a lamb around women!" Foley answered, big-eyed and mock-solemn. "Anyway," he went on, half to himself," I don't think she cared much for me, because she made some kind of a funny movement with her hand—like she was pushing me away, or gesturing me off or something."

"Where did all this take place, Mr. Mathers?" I asked him.

"Down by Whisper creek, Mr. Bullion," Foley answered. "It was kind of funny—I met this good-looking gal just before I come up to that big willow. You know, that real, big one by the bend, where the creek is kind of a pool. She was walking towards me, big as life and mad, like I said, when all-a sudden—whoosh! she wasn't there! Wham! Gone—just like that!" He snapped his fingers. Then he sort of studied a minute. "It looked mad, too, shaking all over," he added. "That tree, I mean."

Mr. Brady was interested by now. He leaned back in his chair and said in that school-book way of his, for all he was a young fellow, "I understand that this used to be Shawnee camping-ground once. Is that so, Mr. Redwine?"

Dan, who had kept his head turned aside during these speeches, muttered, "I reckon so," and I could tell by Honeybird's back, where she stood over the stove, that she was all ears.

Brady went on, "That's interesting what Foley said about an Indian girl, or someone who looked like one. Now if we were superstitious redmen we'd say that Foley'd met the guardian spirit or goddess of something around here, most likely something along the creek, what you folks here call the branch. Our red brothers believed that all things had their good or bad spirits, and they could take any shape or size they wanted. Indian legend is full of bear-women and tree-lovers and buffalo-girls, who sometimes fell in love with human beings. Sometimes I guess they fell into *hate*, too, if I may put it that way." He turned to Foley smiling. "Looks like the mysterious lady of the creek didn't take to Foley here."

Foley opened his mouth like he was going to say something, then shut up and sat heavily down to the table. Honeybird was setting the biscuits in front of him, and as she passed me I could tell she was shaking. I had the queerest feeling, my own self, that I'd heard something like this talk before, but I couldn't figure out why it seemed familiar.

THEN Dan spoke up all of a sudden. "If I was you, Mr. Mathers, I'd not walk that part of the branch."

"Why not?" says Foley.

"Well," says Dan, "that bank's treacherous. Even in a dry spell like we're having now it's always muddy along Whisper Water, and when we have a big rain the bank crumbles fast.

"As for that . . . woman you met," he went on slowly, "I reckon that was old man Tuttle's granddaughter, come from Hurdsville to visit with him. Yes, sir," he added briskly, "I'd say that—there was Willie Pearl Wakefield."

I had to smile to myself, because Willie Pearl is a tubby little tow-head about eleven years old.

Honeybird wasn't smiling. All of a sudden she slapped the greens down and bust out with, "I hate that branch! I hate that Whisper Water, so dark and slimy! And I hate that big old willow most of all! Dan Redwine, I've told you and *told* you all these enduring years, to cut down that nasty old willow! It's bad—bad!"

She was just about screaming, and as we all stared at her she started to cry, ran out of the room and banged the bedroom door.

I made my fareyouwells right soon, as I was embarrassed for Dan's sake. I went home along the branch, like I always did, anyway, but this time with all my senses alert and my ears pricked, so to speak. When I got near the big old willow something dashed out from the brush and I almost yelled my head off. It was nothing but a little old rabbit, but I was taking no chances: I called after it, "Howdy, Mister Rabbit!" the way we boys used to, for good luck. Yes, sir, boss, I was feeling very polite towards *any* creature I met down by Whisper Water right then!

Like Dan had said, it hadn't rained for

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weeks. August was slipping into September, and the weather held—hot, dry and terrible hard on the corn and only less so on the burley. The joe-pye weed's purple looked rusty, and the pasture grass was a sorry sight. The earth was hard as a rock. The only soft spot around was the branch-bed and banks, because even in the driest weather Whisper Water always was full. Queer, come to think of it.

I was so busy hauling water and tending to my crops that I didn't go over to Redwines' for a couple of weeks. I heard bits of news, how the oil crews were hard put to it for water; how Dan's tobacco seemed to be doing a sight better than anyone else's; and how the goings-on between Mrs. R. and Foley Mathers was getting to be a scandal and a shame. Don't ask how those things get around, but I supposed the daylight crew noticed things, coming on and off tower, and talked about it in town. It worried me, on Dan's account, but I reckon I spent more time worrying about my corn and my tobacco than I did anything else.

ONE evening, as I finished milking, Dan came slowly around the side of the barn. He looked unhappy and mad and worried, all at once. In the bitterest voice I've ever heard from him, he said, "Jed Clay, it's true. It's damn true, and I've been a tomfool not to guessed it before this."

"Boy, what you talking about?" I said, though I feared to hear—because I reckoned I knew what was coming.

"Honeybird and that Foley Mathers," said Dan. "Honeybird's been disgracing her and my name with that loud-mouthed tool-dresser, that I ought to have knowed better than to take in my own house." He smashed his fist against the barn wall. "Damn these foreigners, Jed Clay! I wish I'd never leased my land to 'em. I wish they'd never come around here looking for oil."

"Hold on, Dan," said. "What makes you so sure?" I put my arm over his shoulder. "People just naturally talk about a good-looking man or woman, and they're both that. Mathers is a big-talking fellow, but I doubt that it's any more than just sweet-talk and compliments, and such."

"It's more than that, Jed Clay," he answered. "That's all I'm going to say about it, but I'm facing them both with it tonight, and if he or she gets the least bit of a guilty expression, I'm going to light into that Foley and I don't know where I'll stop at."

"Take it easy, Dan—you're admitting right now you ain't really sure. Sleep on it tonight, boy, and don't be so hasty in your anger." I was really scared that Dan *would* jump Foley, and considering the difference in their sizes, Dan was liable to be the worst-used one in *that* ruckus.

I talked and jollied him and thought I'd quieted him down some, because he promised to think it over during the night. But when he turned away to head for home, I had the feeling that I'd never see him again. I started to call him back and ask him to stay the night with Sally and me, and I wish to glory, now, I had.

I worried so about Dan that a couple of days after that I went over to Redwines'. The house looked quiet, and I figured the night-crew were still asleep, it being around four in the evening. I knocked softly on the porch floor, and after a long while Honeybird came to the door. She looked kinda wild and sick. "Dan's not here," she said. "Dan's gone on a trip."

"Gone on a trip?" I said. "Where to?"

"Down to Memphis," she said, in a defiant, you'd-better-believe-me way.

"Memphis?" I guess I yelled it. "*Memphis?* Whatever for? What's Dan doing in Memphis?"

"He's a-visiting some of his kinfolk," she answered. "He's been away couple of days now, visiting his kin down in Memphis."

I was stumped. "I never knew Dan had any kinfolk in Tennessee. He never mentioned any to me, that I recollect."

"Well, he has, and that's where he's went," she snaps back and starts to close the door.

"He's picked a fine time to take a trip," I said. "Right when the burley needs cutting, he goes to *Memphis*—to visit his *kin!*"

"Don't you yell at me, Jed Clay Bullion!" Honeybird's temper was rising. "Can I help it if Dan Redwine's a fool? Always *was* a fool, to my mind."

"That's enough, Miss Honeybird," I said, very mannerly, because I was getting mad.

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myself. "Dan's my friend, and if he wants to take a trip to Memphis, I reckon he knows what he's doing. Funny, though—nobody in town said anything about it when I went in yesterday. Seems like somebody would have seen him take the train, or something." Then just to end the conversation on a pleasanter note, I asked, "How's the oil-well coming? Struck oil yet?"

That did it. She just blew up. "That Foley! That big, drunken ox of a man!"

"Why, what's Foley done?" I asked. "I thought he was your star boarder, Birdie."

"You shut up!" she began, when we heard a sound which most of us had been honing* to hear for weeks—a crack of thunder. Whilst we were talking the sky had begun to clabber up with big purplish clouds, and as we stood there a wind sprang up that smelled of rain not far distant. Lightning split the purple masses, thunder banged away, and the first warm drops fell. Then more of them, and faster, and cooler.

I felt like dancing. "Fare-thee-well, Miz Redwine my bonny-o!" I sang out. "I'm fixing to get home before she busts open and Whisper starts to spill over. Don't want to be caught in the low ground when Whisper starts to flood."

At that I thought she'd gone crazy. She staggered back against the screen door and put her hand to her mouth. "The branch!" she said, like to herself. "O my Lord, the branch!" and slammed both doors shut and I heard her lock the inner one.

Well, I'll swanny, I thought to myself, what a woman! No more manners than backwoods trash. But I forgot about Honeybird, because it was now raining buckets, and our Tatum county clay was already turning slippery under my boots and I had to set my mind on getting home in a hurry. The sky was now one big bruise with white forks of lightning playing over it every few minutes and the rain seemed to come down harder every step. When I passed the rig I saw the daylight crew, Collins and Mack, huddled up in their "dog-house" away from the storm. That made me think of the other crew at the house, and I thought, they won't get much sleep with all this racket. Then another thought struck me — something Honeybird had said. How she'd called Foley a drunken ox . . . "*drunken*?" Mathers was kind of a blow and sweet on the ladies, but he never drank anything stronger than buttermilk!

What had made him a "drunken ox" all of a sudden?

THAT night's storm was the worst I ever did see. Sally and I and the youngones bunched up together in the kitchen, and Sally prayed a little, and I thought about Dan and Honeybird and Foley, and how troublous life can be. I said to Sally, "I'd sure hate to have to go out in *this* tonight! Don't reckon the boys will do any more drilling till it's over. It's not a fit night for a hound dog to be out in," little knowing it wouldn't be many hours before I'd be clumping around in the wind and rain and thunder, looking for a murderer!

NOW comes that part which even now seems mighty hard to credit, even though I saw some things with my own two eyes that no man could rightly disbelieve. But what with the confused and wild way in which Foley told his part of the doings, and the noise and fury of the storm that kept up while he was telling it, together with the downright unnaturalness of the whole business—well, that last part is none too clear after all these years.

Needless to say, Dan hadn't gone to Memphis. Seems that when he left me that evening and went home, he found Honeybird and Mathers talking in the kitchen. Dan walked up to him and asked him what Foley later said was "a very personal question," and one word led to another, and they started belting each other.

I'd always been afraid to see Dan get into a fight with big Foley Mathers, but it seems like he made a fair showing. He was mad and he was hurt, and righteous wrath hath its own strength. Anyway, Honeybird thought her sweetheart was getting the worst of it. Foley said all of a sudden he heard a funny, dull sound, like a squash had been cracked open, and Dan slumped down on the floor, with his head busted wide open

* *"honing"*—Kentucky dialect for longing, fervently wishing.

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—and Honeybird standing over him with a bloody poker in her hands.

She was like a woman made of stone. She told Foley to get Dan out of sight before Mr. Brady got back, and forbade him to go get a doctor, as Foley swears he wanted to do. She said Dan was dead, and she wasn't going to hang for it, and if Foley had any sense he'd help her bury him and pretend he'd gone out of town. They could think up what to do later, she said, and Foley was so dazed with fighting and fear of that awful woman he'd been fool enough to admire, that he followed her like a whipped dog. He slung poor Dan's corpse over his shoulder, and Honeybird got a shovel from the toolshed and they stole out of the house in the dusk.

Hard and dry as the ground was, Honeybird had presence of mind enough to know there wasn't much use digging anywhere but the one spot where the earth was always soft —by Whisper Water. Much as she hated and feared that branch-side, she realized that there was the only place to hide away her husband's poor, broken body. The two of them stole around by way of the woodlot; and down by the branch, where he used to fish and play his mouth-harp, they buried what was left of Dan Redwine. A makeshift grave it was, too, but they were in a mighty hurry and dizzy with fear and, I hope, remorse.

Those next few days must have been plain hell for her and Foley—him having to dress tools and her cooking for him and Mr. Brady, as though nothing had happened and her husband had sure-enough gone on a little trip and would be coming back soon! That was when Foley started drinking, and nobody—almost—knew why.

Then the worst happened. It rained. That downpour that everyone welcomed so was doom and destruction for the guilty pair. No wonder Honeybird mighty near fainted when I mentioned the branch flooding—she had a clear picture of that shallow grave and the way the banks crumbled in a storm!

She rushed into the house and woke Foley, and let him have the news. If he were drunk then, it sobered him up good. He could hear the rain swishing down, and knew that pretty soon the water would uncover what they wanted desperately to stay hidden from the sight of man. I don't reckon they knew what they'd do when they got there, but they couldn't sit around the house in a plight like that—they had to make a stab at covering Dan up better somehow. They crept out of the house, hoping against hope Mr. Brady wouldn't hear them, and through the wind and the lightning and the wild wet they made their way down to Whisper Water. With all that clay pulling at their feet Foley said they ran all the way as if the devil was after them, and maybe he was.

Now here's the part where Foley shook so with pain and fright, and where he'd stop so often to pray or to curse, that it's pretty much of a blur in all our minds, mine and Uncle Wade's and the others who stood around his bed there in the Redwine leanto that night. He says that as they got to the branch, they could hear Whisper Water rushing away between her banks, like something strong and big and angry, and somehow alive. In the semi-darkness they saw that the willow was bending and shaking all over like a woe-begone woman, and the banks were flaking rapidly. The lightning flashes showed that they'd come none too soon! Two stiff, helpless boots and a stretch of blue jeans stuck out from the clay. The earth they'd heaped so hasty over poor Dan's body was washing away, and the husband Honeybird Redwine had murdered was silently condemning her.

The branch was boiling and churning and the trees were tossing in the wind, as they grabbed and dug in the mud with their bare hands, when a terrible glare of lightning lit up the whole place. By its wild light Foley saw the big willow, that had been bending and thrashing like the others, sort of straighten up and hold itself rigid.

Then, before their eyes it seemed to tower into the dark, wild sky, higher and higher like a horrible, huge green fountain, before it swooped down on them like a thing alive! Foley fell over backward before its rush, and in the darkness beside him he felt Honeybird go down, too. He heard her give a fearful scream, and then a kind of awful gurgling noise. Another lightning glare came, and Foley saw what no human being

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ought to ever see—instead of a willow tree, it was a huge, angry Indian woman, brown-skinned, black-braids and all, bending over them—but it wasn't a human woman.

"Then, O my God!" Poley'd cry, as he told and retold that awful scene. "She was reaching down for Honeybird, and choking the life out of her with her long, thin hands!"

BUT the worst is yet to tell. Foley's shrieks brought the crew from the well and Mr. Brady, and together they got him up to the house as best they could—what with his leg hanging broke, where it had caught in a root when he fell. Collins said afterwards that it was caught so tight they could hardly get him loose, "just like it was hands holding him down," he said.

There wasn't a sign of Honeybird. They laid Foley on his bed in the leanto, and Collins got out the Ford and slid and slithered into town for Doc Luttrell. From what he'd seen and heard Collins figured he'd best get the Sheriff, too. Uncle Wade rounded some of us up, and in the wind and rain we went out to look for Honeybird. The storm had died down some, but we still had trouble with our lanterns, and I don't reckon we'd have come across her when we did if it hadn't been for Coleman Tate's old dog Luby. It was really Luby that found Honeybird.

Away down stream, caught among the brush that overhung the bank, was what looked like an old ragbag. Coleman's hound nosed it and let out a howl. It was Honeybird. Wrapped around her throat, coil on coil, so tight that it cut 'way into the skin, was what looked like a thin green rope. Luby set up another howl, and when Coleman and I picked her up, we almost did our own selves.

Not because she was dead. I guess we'd kind of expected that all along. But because that wasn't any rope that had strangled the life out of Honeybird Redwine—it was a long, green willow-wand!

Poor Foley died the next day. Doc Luttrell took off what was left of his leg, but he had a bad fever and what with the pain and the awful fright and . . . other things, like remorse, maybe . . . he just couldn't pull through. Dan was dug up and buried proper in the churchyard, with what was left of Honeybird—Lord pity her—along side him, although I recall there was some sentiment against it. Dan's widowed sister came over from Logan county to run the property. The drillers finished the hole with a new tooldresser Mr. Brady brought down, but they didn't get oil, so pretty soon they shut down and plugged the hole and went away. Things quieted down again, and after a while people sort of forgot about the Redwines, like you do forget things, even the worst.

But Foley had muttered something that night when he was raving and groaning—something that nobody else but me seemed to hear, and which never got into the statement my Uncle Wade writ out and had Foley sign. Yes, Foley seems to think he saw something else when that tree turned into that tall, goblin woman. He seems to have seen her bend down, after she'd cast away poor Honeybird, and sort of scoop up what looked like Dan's body out of his pitiful grave. Only it wasn't the blue-jeaned, dead body of Dan Redwine that Foley had helped bury. It was Dan, all right, but whole and unharmed, like he used to be, and naked as a new-born child! And in his hand he was holding on hard to something, some little object.

I could have told Foley what that was, and the tears come to my eyes to think on it. It was Dan's little old mouth-harp. Yes, sir, that little old mouth-harp that he was never without. And his ghost still held on to it!

Down by Whisper Water of a summer's evening, when the nighthawks are out and the fish are splashing, I've heard a sad, pretty little tune curling and creeping through the willow-wands: "Have you seen my true-love—with the coal-black hair?" and the breeze in the big willow by the pool is sort of humming along with it, like a happy woman whose lover's come to her at last.

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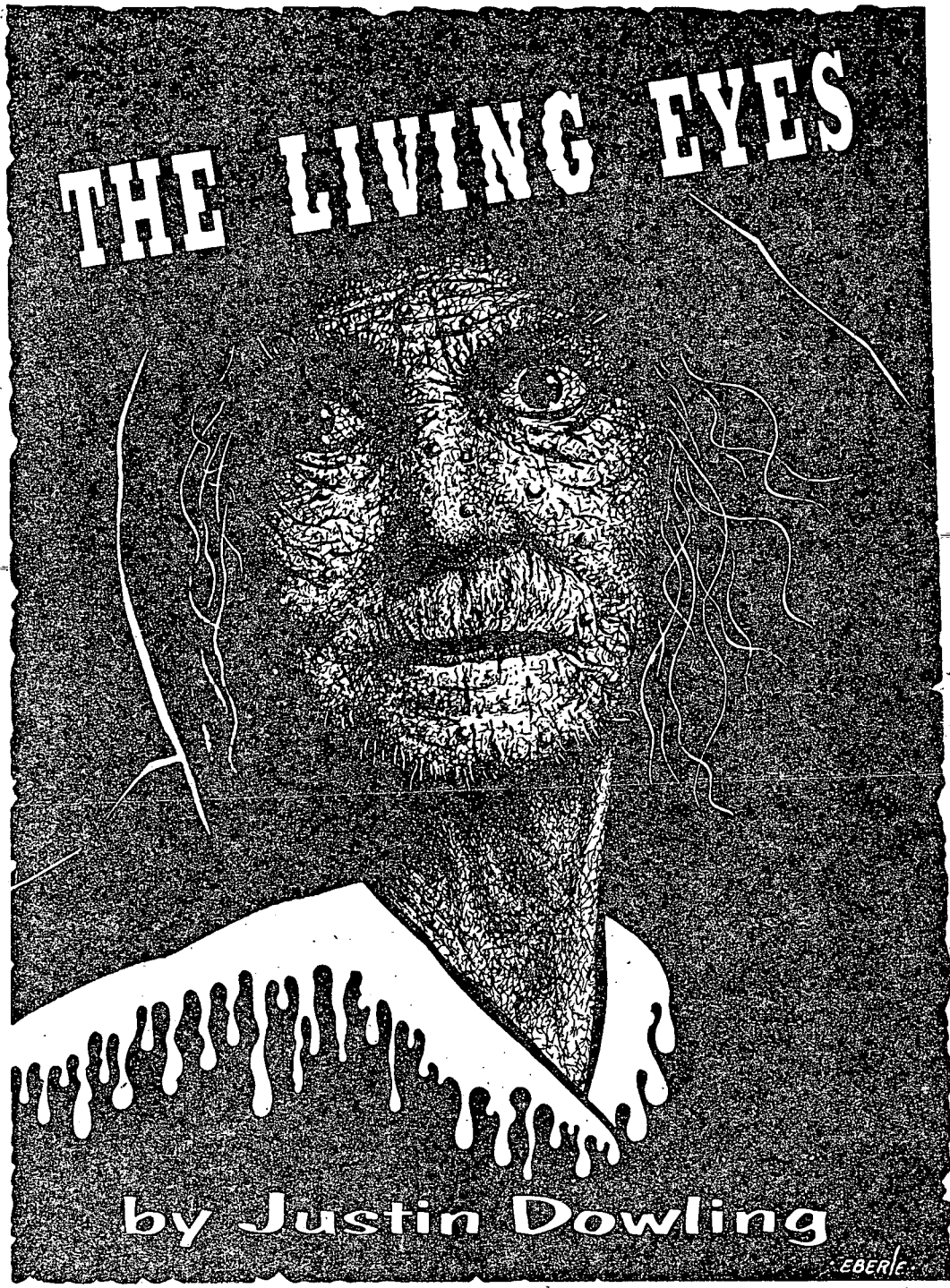

Mrs. Weir might die; her eyes would live forever. . . .

Heading by Joseph Eberle

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I WAS fifteen years old when I first saw Mrs. Weir's eyes, and her useless hands.

If I shut my eyes, I can still see her house, standing apart from others in the village on a hill overlooking the sea on a wild coast.

But above all I can still see Mrs. Weir's eyes and the useless hands, lying across a special board fixed on her wheel chair.

My father, a widower, knew Mrs. Weir and took me to stay with her one winter. "Remember," he said to me, "pass no rude remarks. Mrs. Weir is a queer woman. She has paralyzed legs and hands. Don't stare at her eyes, whatever you do."

"Why are we going, father?" I asked.

"Mrs. Weir has money. She may want to help me. I was a very good friend of hers."

"Will anyone else be there?" I went on.

"Yes," he answered, "her two sons live with her, while a niece will probably be there, with her husband."

The house had the squat, uncomfortable appearance of an old prison. At our knock, the door opened and a large man appeared. "Wot you want?" as asked.

"We want," my father replied, "to see Mrs. Weir. Tell her Mr. Rowlands and his son are here."

The servant said, "Of course, sir. She is expecting you. Come in." As an afterthought he added, "My name is Leonard."

We were ushered into the great hall, and led across to the lounge. "So you have come, Richard," a voice said.

We were both startled because we had thought the room empty. Then we saw a wheel chair, with the dim outline of a figure in it.

"I hope we find you well, Mrs. Weir?" said my father.

"Well enough, Richard," said the voice. "Put on the light."

I sat on the edge of a stiff-backed chair when the light came on. Remembering what my father had said, I stared at her feet. She had on black slippers. Then I looked at her chin, and wanted to laugh at her whiskers. But her mouth, thin and bloodless, choked my mirth. I paused. Then I lifted my head. The shock nearly made me cry out!

I stared into eyes so prominent, grotesque, hideous and terrifying, that I wanted to run from the room.

They protruded from their wide sockets as if on sticks. The white parts were a mass of red veins entangled in a million tiny threads, writhing and twitching, expanding and shrinking, as she blinked.

They were alive in a manner strangely apart from the rest of her.

I dropped my glances to the useless hands, lying on the board fixed across her chair. There was nothing unusual about them. They lay on their backs, with the fingers slightly curled. I wanted to pull the fingers straight; to whip some action from them; stir life into them; to make them move. That they could not do so without aid, chilled me; fascinated me; frightened me.

ALL this time my father and Mrs. Weir had been talking, but I had not heard a word of it. Then I heard Mrs. Weir say to me, "You will sleep in the west wing. Leonard will unpack your clothes. Remember to dress for dinner, wash your hands and face and do not be late. Do not stare so, boy!"

I ran from the room. Finding my bedroom, I flung myself down upon the four-poster bed. I covered my face with my hands, but could still see the protruding eyes, with the veins twisting and turning, knotting and untying—and the useless hands lying on their backs.

I was introduced to the other guests. The sons, who were as old as my father, lifelessly shook my hand without looking at me.

Mrs. Weir's niece was thin and short, beside her lanky husband. At dinner Mrs. Weir sat at the top of the table, her useless hands on a board. One son sat at an angle to the table, so that he could feed his mother.

By candlelight, her eyes were even more startling than before. I had resolved not to look at them, if possible. I might as well have tried to walk on water. The veins had gathered in a blotch, and throbbed. Then they quickly flowed back in all directions, twisting and entangling themselves in a mad flurry. Again I was aware of their alive-

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ness, which was so apart from the rest of her. Eyes that lived in a dead face.

It was obvious to me, even though I was so young at the time, that Mrs. Weir's eyes dominated everybody with whom she came into contact. They cowered all opposition. Those who spoke did so in a low tone. Heads were raised and dropped hurriedly. People full of life and vigor, happy and strong, dried up under those eyes like an orange left in the sun.

Leonard took great delight in frightening me. He told me about a pretty girl of fourteen, who had once insulted Mrs. Weir at a flower show. She cried: "Oh, Mummy, look at those awful eyes!"

Leonard said that Mrs. Weir had been very angry. She never forgot or forgave. When the child had grown into the full blossom of beautiful womanhood, she had been invited to stay at Doonside, Mrs. Weir's house. She was as beautiful as a rose until Mrs. Weir crushed her; crumpled her until her senses left her. Leonard said that she still screamed in her room at the asylum: "The eyes! They are eating me!"

I could imagine them doing that, and how the little veins would leap in excitement in the process.

Leonard hated Mrs. Weir. "She's not 'uman," he said.

During a meal the son fed her carefully. He did not eat himself until he was sure she had finished. All the time her eyes lashed him as effectively as a whip. Head sunken on his chest he would, each time he lifted the spoon to her mouth, gaze into her eyes.

After dinner, that first night, I went out and down the path through some tall trees. I went to a place where I could see the water spraying against the rocks. The sound of the sea soothed me—I almost forgot the eyes. A rustling behind made me spin around. It was Leonard.

He grinned and said, "Mrs. Weir says you must go to bed."

I was furious. What right had she to tell me what to do?

He went on: "Mrs. Weir said that if you refused I was to bring you to her."

The prospect of facing her eyes again that night decided me. I went to bed.

The next day, when my father told me he was going to marry Mrs. Weir, I threw myself on my bed and cried.

"You'll get used to her," he said. "She won't live for ever."

She lived for another three years.

The wedding ceremony was performed in the lounge. I could never forgive my father for such an act. To think that Mrs. Weir was to be my stepmother! That I was to live under the permanent lash of the eyes. They would crush me; eat me alive!

The only consolation I had was that I was to go to a boarding school. I would be home only in the holidays.

Mrs. Weir was dressed entirely in black, except for a white veil. My father looked grim and handsome in his frock coat and knife-edged trousers. Mrs. Weir sat in her wheel chair, propped up straight with cushions. Her hands lay on their backs on the board. I only saw her eyes once. The mass of veins were taking a leading part in the ceremony. They leapt and fought each other in a whirl of excitement; brilliantly red. The eyeballs protruded further from their taut sockets.

Then I knew what was really happening. *Mrs. Weir's eyes were being married!*

There could be no other explanation. The rest of her was dead.

Then I glanced at the hands, lying on their backs. On one of the fingers was now a ring—glittering. Mrs. Weir had moved her fingers! Impossible! Incredible! But it was true.

The eyes were married!

The next three years of my life were ones of happiness at school and horror at "home." Every holiday I came under the merciless lashing of the eyes. Every time it became worse.

My father hardly spoke to me. He was now a constant attendant on my stepmother.

One holiday the relatives came, carbon copies of each other, dejected, miserable people with one thing on their minds—the death of Mrs. Weir and whether my father was now going to be left the vast Weir fortune.

One night, when I was in the library, I heard Mrs. Weir raise her voice, passionate-

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ly. She said, "I know what you are all thinking! You wish me dead. And now I warn you. Should I die unnaturally, I shall return to strangle my murderer, and the marks of my fingers shall be upon his, or her, throat. My eyes shall follow the rest of you until death."

Ten months later she was dead.

I WAS home for the holidays, and most of the relatives were there. My father called me into the room, with the others.

She was dead, but the eyes were open, staring. Alive—as if they refused to die. My father tried to pull the lids down, but they shot up each time, like a blind.

The veins continued to writhe and twist, turn and contract expand and leap.

I do not know what made me say it, but I startled the others in the room. I said, softly, *"Mrs. Weir is dead, but her eyes will live forever."*

Then everybody remembered her dreadful warning. All were afraid.

The next few days were ones of tramping police feet. The doctor had been suspicious. A post mortem was held. Poison was found in her stomach. A fat detective asked questions. His pig eyes suspected everyone, but most of all, Leonard.

When they arrested him he cursed and swore at them. He shouted to us from the police car, "She'll be back for the real murderer. She said so. She's in'uman."

On the last night we slept at the house, screams awoke us at midnight. We tumbled out into the great hall.

Someone said, "Where's Rowlands?"

He was missing—and there had been screams!

We rushed to my father's room and burst open the door. He lay on his back, staring up at the ceiling, but not seeing. He was dead.

He had been strangled. There were finger marks on his throat.

Someone shouted, "Look! Look!" as the lights failed.

In the gloom we saw Mrs. Weir's eyes. They were hanging in mid air, staring at us, bright, horrifying *and alive*. Like they had been on her wedding day.

Then they were gone.

We tried to convince ourselves that it was an hallucination. We took a fainting woman to the lounge. One of the sons moaned, "It can't be! We imagined it! It's against the laws of nature."

Mrs. Weir's niece suddenly shouted: "She said she would come back and strangle the one . . ."

Leonard got off. There was not enough evidence. I was glad.

THIRTY years have passed since the death of Mrs. Weir and my father, but the eyes are still alive. They haunt me. Alive, they are destroying me.

My doctor says it is my imagination, and I never actually see them. That my mind was so vividly impressed when I was young that I now project them from my subconscious mind into reality.

The two sons are dead. Mrs. Weir's niece is in an asylum. Her husband shot himself.

I know the doctor is wrong. Mrs. Weir's eyes will come again. I hope this document is found.

Her eyes will come again. And I will be waiting. I have made up my mind.

This time I will tell them. Tell them to bring the hands. The hands for my throat. The hands to leave their finger marks. Hands that were useless in life, deadly in death.

I will tell the eyes they were wrong. Wrong about my father. He did not kill Mrs. Weir.

It was me. I put the poison in her glass of wine. The poison I found in my father's bag.

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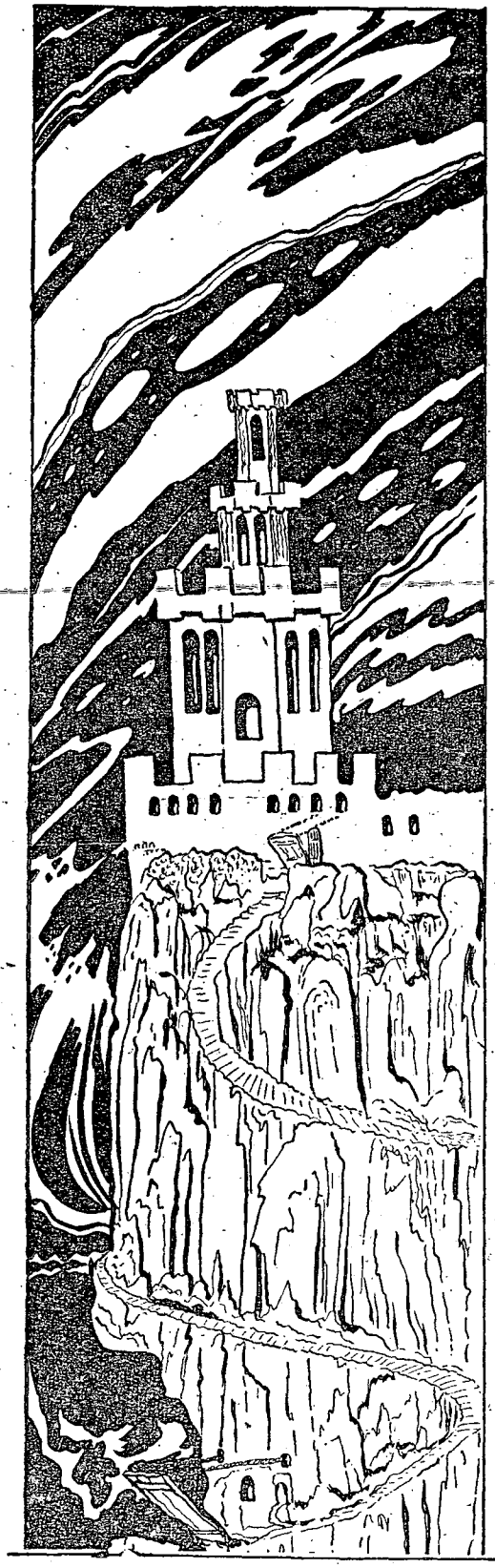

I'll Be Back

BY DAVID EYNON

. . . she'll be waiting for me, even if she is dead.

I suppose the castle is still back there in Lorraine, if the shellfire didn't batter it to pieces that night after I left. Maybe the hollyhocks have pushed up among the blackened beams and perhaps the birds are nesting again in the crack over the doorway. At least Redine is there, that's for sure. And she's waiting for me, even if she is dead.

Why don't I go back, you wonder? Well, what is there, in a pile of broken stones and shattered timbers, that would give me back a blue eyed girl who spoke so softly? And on the hill that overlooks Metz the yellow gorse might be in bloom. It would remind me too much of her hair. No, I'm not quite ready to return yet, I think. And besides, it doesn't really matter. She'll wait for me. She's already waited nine hundred years, you see.

It seems as if I graduated from High School centuries ago, and yet it was only 1944. I never finished, really. In the middle of February I went into the army and mother collected my diploma that May. I was in England by that time, and the army had taught me a lot that high school had overlooked.

We didn't know it then, but the invasion was only a few weeks away. The most I could wangle was a three-day pass from duty, so I decided to look up an old aunt of my father's who lived in the Welsh mountains north of Cardiff. Aunt Elizabeth, her name was, and I hadn't seen her since she came to America in 1936.

She lived in an old barn of a place, so isolated that I needed a whole day to get back to it. First I went to Cardiff, then the

Heading by Anthony Di Giannurio

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train to Merthyr-Tydwell and finally a bus up into the hills. It was nearly dark when I climbed the steep street that led to Auntie's house.

The maid who opened the door was a little woman, well beyond fifty, I guess. She looked frightened when she saw me standing in the darkness. Finally she spoke to me in Welsh, but I didn't understand so she left me standing at the door and went to get my Aunt.

Auntie didn't recognize me at first. Not until I spoke. Then she realized who I was and took me into the living room and sat me before the fire. It was one of those old-fashioned places, like a setting from Dickens, with the firelight splashing over the family portraits on the wall and a large, gray cat curled up on the hearth watching a singing teapot.

My Aunt sat down in her chair by the fire and poured me a cup of tea. Her face hadn't changed much with the years and her eyes, lighted by the fire, were brighter than ever. Only her gray hair showed she was past eighty.

For at least an hour I was forced to answer questions about the family in America. When Auntie's eager questions were exhausted she settled back in her chair and started to ramble on about the past. What with most of the family spread about the world I suppose she got used to living here, quietly going over the past in her mind, stopping occasionally to digest some bit of information from a relative in India or the States.

Her talk didn't interest me much. The warmth of the fire and the strong tea almost put me to sleep. When the clock struck midnight in doleful tones I came to with a start. The fire had died and the cat, seeking warmth, was curled up in Auntie's lap.

"You're waiting for the invasion, I suppose," she said, as if it were a foregone fact. She startled me, for the topic was secret and we weren't supposed to even discuss it with civilians. She noticed my surprise and chuckled.

"You forget, we've been waiting for it a long time here," she said. There was resignation in her voice and she stroked the cat as she spoke.

"It isn't the first invasion, you know. As a matter of fact, our family came to England in an invasion."

"Normans?" I asked, putting the cup and saucer down on the hearth.

"Yes," she said. "Not many of the Normans penetrated this far into Wales. That's how I am sure of our ancestry. Our family rather stands out on the record, as it were."

"Where were they from in France, Auntie?"

"I don't know, exactly. Someplace in the north, I think," she said, refilling the tea cups. "There's an interesting story connected with it, if you'd care to listen," she said, moving gingerly to avoid disturbing the cat.

"Sure," I said.

"Well," Auntie said, "it seems the first of our family to arrive in England—he had the same name as you do, incidentally—left his fiancee behind. He never went back for her, apparently, and the story goes that she moved into the family chateau and kept it waiting for him until she died." Auntie paused for a moment to stir up the fire.

"That's not the first time a girl has been jilted, I guess," I said.

"No, I suppose not," Auntie replied. "Still, if you get to France soon," she said with a faint smile, "you might keep an eye open for the old place."

"How on earth could I recognize it?" I asked.

AUNTIE pointed to the bookshelf beside the hearth. "If you'll just hand me the family bible," she said, "I can show you our coat of arms. It's the only clue, unfortunately, but I do wish you'd let me know if you run across it anywhere. Genealogy has become rather a hobby with me."

I took the old leather bound volume from the shelf and Auntie found the arms inscribed in the front of it. They were very simple—a chevron on a silver shield with three ravens across the top. It seemed foolish to imagine that I would run across any trace of such a chateau. But it was Auntie's hobby, so I assured her I'd let her know if anything turned up.

It took me all the next day to get back to my base, and there were no more passes after that. We hit the beaches early in June

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and from there through to Paris I thought only of keeping in one piece. Nobody's luck lasts forever, though, and just outside Metz I got a knee load of mortar fragments.

It couldn't have been more than a mile from the hospital, where it happened. When I woke up the worst of it was over. I had a million dollar wound—enough to break the mathematical curve of mortality that governed life and death in the infantry. By the time I would have to go back to the front I could start fresh on the law of averages.

The hospital wasn't bad at all, just dull. There was no way to kill time but gambling, and I wasn't a good loser, besides which I was almost broke. A doctor in the outfit was from my home town, luckily, and when my knee was a little bit better he loaned me his jeep so I could drive around the area and take in the sights.

Metz is an old town, fortified in the middle ages and still full of ancient houses and taverns. The Jerries had it fortified in modern style and it was hell to take away from them. Inside the city was mostly filth and wreckage so I stuck to the outside roads, exploring through the hills and thick woods behind the town.

It was on one of those mud filled ruts—which the French call class B highways—that I met Redine. In the distance, at first sight, she looked like a child. She was slogging along in oversized sabots. A wisp of blonde hair had slipped out from under the shawl over her head.

When I drew up beside her the jeep threw mud on her stockings and she looked around at me and I saw she was eighteen or so. I apologized, in high school French, for splashing her and she nodded. I couldn't think of the French word for "Ride" so I just gave her the hitch hike signal. She was pretty cool in replying, even if I had splattered mud on her, but finally she did get into the jeep.

At intervals she gave me brief directions until we were way back in the thickets. The road had become almost a trail and I began to wonder if she might not be lost herself when we drew up before a cottage.

It was an odd sort of place, made of stones which were far too large for a peasant's hut. The windows were high, narrow affairs, vast slits in the wall. The heavy oak door, laced with wrought iron, didn't give the house a friendly tone. Only the thatch roof looked like what you'd expect to find a farm girl living under.

She didn't really want to ask me in, I think, but Noblesse Oblige apparently forced her to. She suggested, grudgingly, that I might feel like a cup of coffee and so would I care to park my jeep and visit awhile?

I accepted her invitation more from devilishness than desire. She shrugged and, turning quickly from the jeep, led me into the house. Like I said, it was no castle, but she behaved as if it were. When I got inside I slumped down in the largest chair I could find, just to be irritating. I didn't get any reaction from her, though. She just took off her shawl and called out something in a brand of French I couldn't make out.

An old peasant woman, who obviously wasn't a relative, but also not too much of a servant, ambled out from the back room and mumbled with Redine. After a few sentences of that weird French, which seemed almost archaic, the old woman went and got us some coffee.

"Je regrette que nous n'avons pas encore du sucre," Redine said, handing me the cup and saucer.

"S'ok," I said. "I can do without the sugar all right."

We sat and drank the coffee slowly. Even unsweetened it was pretty good stuff. We stared at each other a bit, then drank awhile, then sat holding our empty cups and wondered what to say. It was pleasant to relax in home-like surroundings with a girl my own age. That's what made me behave so quickly, I suppose, in the manner Redine seemed to expect. Then, too, her eyes had turned to cornflower blue since we came into the cottage, and the firelight suddenly shimmered from her hair.

"You are in France a long time?" she asked, trying to be frostily formal.

"Eight months," I said. "We landed in June." Her coolness prompted me to keep talking about myself and I found her charming. It was midnight before I knew it. She yawned daintily so I picked up my trenchcoat and prepared to shove off. When

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she saw me to the door her irritating "Noblesse Oblige" attitude showed up again.

"One hopes to see you again," she said in charmingly accented English.

"Sure thing," I said, and delighted in the frown it brought to her face. The lights went out in her house as I turned the jeep into the path back to the main road. When I finally reached the highway I stopped and dropped an empty gas-can as a landmark. Then I drove back to the hospital whistling.

THE next morning I was up earlier than I had been in weeks. There was a letter from Auntie waiting at the office which I didn't take time to read but just stuffed in my jacket pocket as I walked over to the garage.

It took me half the morning, nosing around the back roads in the jeep, to find the empty gas-can lying by the road. When I got to the end of the path I could see Redine with a bundle of sticks in front of the cottage.

As the brakes squealed she looked up, surprised. I cut the ignition and got out.

"One hopes to see me again—*Alors*, I return," I said brightly.

"How did you find your way back here?"

"I can smell coffee cooking for miles."

"Would you like some coffee?" she asked, turning toward the door.

"Be right with you," I said. I stopped and took some cans of fruit juice from the back of the jeep. When I got inside the cottage she had two places set on the large table before the fireplace. The old woman was nowhere in sight but a gray cat stalked out of the back room and stared at me.

I slumped down at the table—a bit more respectfully this time—and took Auntie's letter from my pocket. It was six months old and had gone through a half dozen stops before it reached the hospital. There wasn't much in it, except a reminder not to forget about the family chateau, and a sketch of our coat of arms.

I crumpled the letter and tossed it into the fireplace that took up most of the far wall of the front room.

"What do you burn?" Redine asked.

"Love letter," I said. It got no reaction so I quit and turned to the light meal she had put on the table. I opened a can of orange juice with my pocket knife and shoved it over to Redine.

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est?*" she asked.

"Today we live," I said. "The PX just got in a batch of the stuff. Orange juice. *Jus de fruit.*"

She tasted it testily and poured some into a glass. Breakfast was as silent as most of the meals I had there after that. Not necessarily a cold, sullen silence. Neither was it a silence of familiarity. Just a sort of neutral quiet. When we did talk it was with an odd intimacy—unrevealing of feelings yet with a certain companionship. There was never any lightness in the relationship between Redine and myself. If there was humor, it was sardonic. The sombre setting of our association seemed to keep the tone of our acquaintance quiet.

The huge, dark livingroom was frequently lighted only by the fire and the winter sun penetrating the narrow windows. The walls of the room were infinitely distant in the shadows. Only the heavy table, with Redine sitting at the far end, seemed within reach physically or mentally.

This kept up for almost a month. At times I tried to penetrate her reserve, but she fended me off lightly, without effort. To Redine I was like a huge dog, that meant well but was always underfoot. A dog that had to be treated firmly, but gently enough not to have its feelings hurt. I don't think she realized that I saw this, either. I imagine she just figured all GI's for slobs—and me for slob number one.

If she ever took anything from me, for instance, she always did it to spare my feelings, rather than insult me by refusing my gifts. She couldn't have gotten much food anywhere else and she looked as if she could stand a square meal or two, but pride was stronger than hunger with her. She was kind of ethereal, like they say in books.

No matter what type she was, I'd have missed her anyway on that morning when I left for the front again. My knee was working swell by then and I just had enough time left for a brief goodbye before starting up the road across Luxembourg.

Redine rode with me down to the end of the lane from her house. While she was

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still sitting in the jeep I gathered up my nerve and kissed her lightly on the cheek. She just sat stiffly and said nothing. When it was time to go she got out of the jeep and stood staring down at her sabots.

"I'll be back sometime," I said, like any GI who ever left any girl. She looked up at me sharply and when I saw her eyes I really did want to come back. There was interest in her look, as if maybe I wasn't a slob any longer. There was also a touch of ruefulness.

"You won't be back," she said, and it made me kind of cold to hear her say it. I'm not superstitious but I assured her, vehemently, that I would be back.

She just smiled slightly, the first smile of hers that I had ever seen, and waved as I started the jeep off.

AND I did come back, too. That was the only satisfaction I had on that awful night—the night when the Jerries first turned the tide on us in the Bulge. All the way back on the road from Luxembourg I kept telling myself she was wrong, I was coming back. The same day I left, too.

Driving along the shell pocked road my only thought was to get to the cottage. As the jeep lurched along a wheel would occasionally plunge into a hole and send a shower of freezing water up into the headlight beams. The shell fire was getting louder now. The low, sharp whine of the 88's, fired point blank, flat trajectory, could be picked out clearly against the background of the longer range German artillery. By morning they would be across Luxembourg and sweeping further—God knew how much further. There was little enough to stop them, at the beginning of the Bulge.

But I couldn't get much further, in any case. My gas was nearly gone or I'd probably have missed the turn off from the main road, down the lane that led to Redine's cottage. The low hanging branches caught at my jeep as it tore through the narrow path. When it shot into the clearing before the house I hit the brakes and it slithered to a stop in the new fallen snow.

The building was dark and forbidding in the moonless night, but it was the only place in the world with which I had any associations left. After my flight across Lorraine it was almost home.

My boots crunched in the snow as I walked around to the front door. The echo of my knock gave the impression that the house was empty. No one was up to let me in, for sure, so rather than wake Redine I tried the door. It was open and I stumbled through into the darkness.

With the light from my cigarette lighter I checked the drapes, and when they were closed I felt for the fireplace and lighted a candle that was sitting on the mantel. The yellow light sprang up and fought its way towards the outer edges of the room.

The two cups were still on the table—the remains of the breakfast I'd had with Redine that morning. The pewter pot was half full of coffee so I lighted a small fire in the hearth and put it on to warm. The sound of the wood sputtering cut into the sombre silence and the pot started gurgling.

I took the pot off the fire and went back to the two cups on the table. As I sat down in the oversize chair and lighted my last cigarette the past and future came back into focus again.

As I said before, this cottage was the closest thing to a home that Europe had to offer me. Even here I felt strange, in spite of the past month in which I had spent most of my time here—in fact, in the chair in which I was sitting. The chair seemed to claim me, almost, and I settled down deeper into it and wondered how soon Redine would be awake.

I waited for the dawn, more to be able to prove Redine's prediction was wrong, I guess, than anything else. When the light started creeping feebly through the crack under the door I leaned over to snuff out the candle. I had just finished the last of the coffee when I heard the plane's hum.

One of the jerries must have broken through our remaining air cover and spotted the house. With the many jeep tracks running into the clearing it would look just like a command post from where the German was sitting.

Before I could get out to hide the jeep I heard the plane's machine guns rattle and the gas tank of my vehicle went up with a dull boom.

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By the time the kraut had his plane turned round I was through the cellar door and half-way down the steps. I thought of Redine, but the back room was empty, and there was no place else she could have been.

I knew that the German would drop something heavier on his second pass, so I groped through the darkness of the cellar as fast as I could, using my cigarette lighter as a torch. The Kraut must have made a slow, leisurely turn for his second run. Otherwise I couldn't have gotten through the long expanse of passages under the cottage. It seemed like there were more rooms below ground than above.

As I look back, it's easy to see that the cottage was only the remaining two rooms of an old chateau. But at the time the only thing I noticed were the coffins stacked in the last room into which I stumbled.

The Zippo didn't throw much light, but my eyes were dilated by fear. When I turned towards the coffin in the center of the vault the arms engraved on it leaped out at me. Of all things to remember at that time Auntie's was the craziest, I guess, but the arms I saw were identical with those she had shown me in the family bible.

I had only just noticed the three ravens on the coffin when the Jerry came in again. He overshot the cottage slightly—probably one of their younger pilots—and the bomb skipped along the ground until it exploded just on top of the family vault I was in.

Imagine all the people in the world screaming in your ear at once and you'll know what it was like. No noise at first, only a sea of pressure sweeping over you, then the yelling followed by blackness.

When I came out of it the ceiling was cracked wide open and I was looking up at the morning sky through the clouds of dust that swirled in the underground room. I remember grabbing the edge of the coffin to pull myself up and then I leaned over to shake my head clear again.

By the time the dust had settled I was sure that nothing in my body was broken and I felt that I had got off easy. Then I looked down into the coffin whose lid had been blown off. There, in a remarkable state of preservation after what must have been centuries of interment, lay the body of Redine in the rags of a wedding dress.

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Heading
by
W. H. Silvey

Trees, plants, vegetables had mysteriously developed will power of their own, had cast off the dominance of man.

HARVEST

Donald Wandrei

THE sun had scarcely risen when Al Meiers shoved himself away from the breakfast table and lumbered to his feet. A big, powerful man even for the Shawtuck County region of husky farmers, he had a face like tanned leather and arms whose hair lay swart over muscles like cables. He was all bone and solid flesh. Though past fifty, he strode with the ease of youth.

"That was a good breakfast, maw," he drawled to his almost spherical wife. She smiled out of eyes that had smiled through drought, storm, plague of locusts, and depression.

"Get along with you. Them apples 'll never get picked with you aloafin' around here all day."

"Them apples 'll be down by night. Hank!" he roared. The harvest hand, drip-

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ping of suds and rainwater on the doorstep, hastily smeared his face with a towel.

"There ought to be over two hundred bushel," said Al.

"Maybe more." Hank, a wiry drifter, slouched beside Al as they passed the chicken-coops. Roosters crowed, hens squawked out of their way, and the spring chickens beeped in alarm. Al made a splendid figure even in his dirty overalls, a bronzed giant of the soil.

They passed the pig-sty where sows and porkers squealed over a sour-smelling trough. The sun stood just above the horizon, and the warm air held that peculiar scent of late summer—smell of cattle and manure, of clover, hay, and wheat, of baked earth and ripening vegetation.

A wagon loaded with empty bushel baskets stood by the barn. Al hitched the horses and took the reins. The team of Belgian Grays ambled down a dirt road.

"It's been a good year for crops," said Al. He jammed tobacco in an old corncob pipe and lighted it without loosening the reins.

"Yeah. Only there's something funny about 'em this year."

"Yeah. They're bigger. Biggest ever."

Hank spat out a hunk of plug. "That ain't all. They kind of shake even if there ain't no wind. As I was sayin' yesterday, I got to feelin' pretty queer when the tomato patch kind of shook when I was hoein' it."

"Giddyap!" Al bellowed. The team clattered faster. He inhaled and blew out a cloud of fragrant smoke. "Uh-huh. I don't know what's got into things. Best weather and best crops we ever had but something's wrong. Last fall the crops started growin' again about harvest-time. The damnedest thing. It wasn't till October we got all the spuds in and the corn-crib full."

Hank looked uneasy. "I don't like it. There been times when I, well, I just didn't feel right."

"Yeah?"

Hank lapsed into moody silence.

"Yeah?" Al prodded.

"There wasn't any wind yesterday but I swear the north clover patch flattened out when I started to mow."

"Yeah? You been seein' things." Al was noncommittal. Hank kept silent.

"I never saw corn grow like this year," said Al after awhile. The horses clopped along. "Ten foot high if it's an inch. Fred Altmiller was sayin' the other day that he figured on gettin' a hundred fifty bushel to the acre. Nary an ear less'n a foot long."

Hank moped. "Last time I went through your corn was the damnedest racket you ever heard. You'd of thought a storm come up. There wasn't a cloud nowhere. Wasn't any wind."

"Lay off the corn likker," Al jibed.

"Wasn't corn likker," Hank protested. "It's the crops are queer. I'd of bet there was somebody around when I weeded the melons last week. Sounded like voices."

"What did?"

"Why, just everything. Whispers, like the corn was talkin'."

Al snorted. "You're headed for the bug-house. I been here for thirty years an' I never hear tell of such a story."

"It's so! It's been goin' on all summer!"

The wagon bumped through fields of ripe wheat and oats, lurched around an immense boulder, and rattled up a hill where cows munched at grass strewn between stones and scrubby trees.

Al agreed with Hank but he wouldn't admit it. The first principle of stolid people is to deny the existence of what cannot be explained and does not harmonize with the run of experience. Ever since the phenomenal post-season growth of vegetables and fruit last fall, he had been wondering. The spring planting, the perfect weather, bumper crops, truly miraculous yields—these blessings were offset by certain evidence that had made him increasingly uneasy. There was the matter of waving grass on still days. He hadn't yet gotten over the way the trees hummed one hot afternoon when he was spraying the apple and cherry orchards.

"Anyway, it's been a good year," he repeated. "Them apples are prize winners. The trees are bustin' with 'em."

The wagon bumped across the hill-top and the horses plodded down. "Just look at 'em, just look — well — uhh," his voice petered out.

Yesterday an orchard of Jonathans had occupied this acre between two small hills.

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Yesterday.

Today there was only torn soil and furrows stretching toward the opposite hill.

Al gaped and his face turned a mottled red. Hank's eyes popped. He opened his mouth and closed it. He stared as if at a ghost. He ran a finger around his neck. The sun slanted higher. The field lay bright and newly ploughed. But there were no apple trees.

Al blasted the morning air with a howl. "Some dirty thief has swiped my apples!" he yelled.

Hank looked dazed. "There ain't any trees, ain't any apples, ain't nothing."

Al sobered. "Not even roots."

"No stumps," said Hank.

They stared at the bare ground and at each other.

"The orchard walked off," Hank suggested.

The horses whinnied. The red in Al's weathered face died out. It became a study in anger and bewilderment.

"Come on!" he choked and flicked the horses' flanks with a whip. They plunged down-hill, slewed onto the field, and followed the furrows over the looted soil, across undulating mounds, and straight through a field of wheat. There was a swathe like the march of an army.

"It can't be. I'm dreamin', we're both crazy," muttered Al.

Hank fidgeted. "Let's go back."

"Shut up! If someone's swiped my apples I'll break him in half! The best crop in thirty years!"

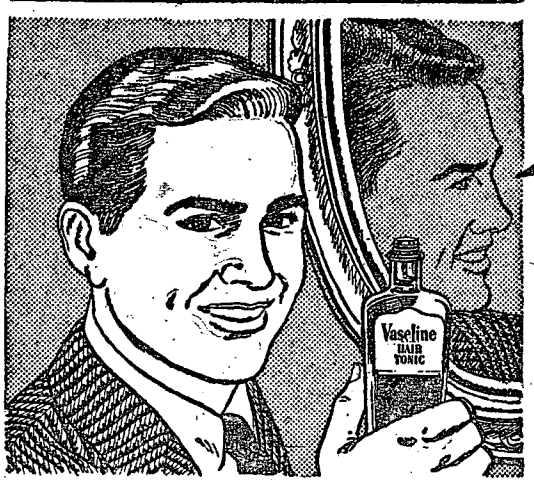
Hank pleaded, "Listen, Al, it ain't only the apples. The whole trees 're gone, root an' all. Nobody can do that in a night!"

AL DROVE grimly. The horses galloped over a hill to the road and followed it as it wound down toward a small lake betwen terminal moraines. There they jerked to an abrupt halt under Al's powerful drag.

Al glared. Hank's eyes roved aimlessly around. He fumbled for a chew which he bit off and absently spit out. He tried to loosen an open shirt. He didn't want to see what he saw. "So help me God," he mut-

oooo oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"HE'S GOT LADDIE BOY in check all right, but not Dry Scalp. My, what unkempt hair! Looks like a mane . . . and I'll bet it's as hard to comb. Loose dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



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tered, "so help me God," over and over, like a stuck phonograph record.

Here stood the orchard of Jonathan apples grouped around the pond; a half-mile from its accustomed place, but otherwise intact.

Al leaped out, a peculiar blank expression on his face. He walked with the attitude of a cat stalking prey.

The orchard of Jonathans wavered.

There was no wind.

The orchard looked for all the world like a group debating. Whispers and murmurs ascended, and the branches shook.

Hank leaned against the dash-board. Tobacco juice dribbled from his gaping mouth and watered his new crop of whiskers.

"Come on!" snarled Al. "Get them poles and nets. We're gonna pick apples!"

But he did not need to pick apples. He reached for a luscious red Jonathan hanging low on the nearest tree. The branch went back, then forward, like a catapult. Al ducked. The apple smacked the wagon. Both horses whinnied and raced off. As if that were a signal, the orchard launched into violent motion. A noise like a rushing wind rose. The tree-tops bent and lashed as in a gale. Apples showered the farmers, darkened the air, bounced and squashed painfully from faces and shins and bodies.

The ungodliest yell ever heard in Shawtuck County burst from the throat of a hired hand whose terrific speed carried him after the careening wagon out of the picture, and the county.

LARS ANDERSEN was walking along a path with a scythe on his shoulder to mow some odd plots of hay, early that morning. His Scotch collie bounced beside him.

The path went around a vegetable garden and then paralleled a wind-break of elms. Now it is a well-known fact that any intelligent dog will have nothing to do with grass or mere vegetables.

The collie, being a dog of rigidly conventional habits, made a bee-line for one of the trees. Whatever he intended to do was postponed. The lowest branch of the tree curved down and not only whipped his rear smartly but lifted him a good dozen feet away. He yelped and tore home like mad.

Lars had a thoughtful expression on his face as he turned around and headed back. He guessed he didn't feel much like mowing today.

Old Emily Tawber fussed with her darning until mid-morning before laying it aside. "Jed can wait for his socks," she muttered crossly. "I can't cook and sew and tend to the crops all at once, and them watermelons ripe for market."

She put her mending back in the big wicker basket, pulled a vast-brimmed straw hat over her head, and went out in an old rag dress that she used for chores.

She stomped across the yard and through her flower garden to the melon patch. There were about fifty big melons ready for picking. She would pile them up alongside the path for Jed to load and take to market in the morning.

"Land's sakes, I never see such melons in all my born days." Old Emily stuck her arms on her hips and surveyed the green ovals. These were giant watermelons, three and four feet long, weighing a hundred pounds or more. She had been surprised throughout the summer by their growth.

"Well, the bigger they be, the more they'll fetch," she decided and went after the first one.

It must have been on a slope for it rolled away as she approached.

"Well, I swan!" said old Emily. "Things is gettin' to a pretty pass when you can't get at your own seedin's."

She walked after the watermelon. It rolled farther. Old Emily became flustered. She increased her stride. The melon bumped unevenly in a wide circle around the vine-root. Old Emily panted after it and it wobbled crazily always just ahead of her.

Old Emily began to feel dizzy. She guessed the sun was too much for her. She wasn't as spry as she used to be. The world reeled around. The melon kept going, while she paused for breath, then it rolled all the way around, came toward her, and crashed into her ankles. The blow sent her sprawling. This was when peril first entered her thoughts. She staggered to her feet and from the patch.

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"Watermelon won't get me," she crooned. "Watermelon run along but he won't get me. Don't let old watermelon get me." This was all that anyone heard her say during the rest of her earthly existence.

THE harvester thundered as Gus Vogel gave it the gas and it clattered toward his wheat acreage.

Gus hollered, "With this weather we'll be done come night!"

"If the machines don't break down," bawled brother Ed above his machine's racket.

"Wheat is two dollar 'n' a quarter a bushel," Gus chortled. "I bet we get a hundred bushel to the acre this year."

The two machines rattled along a dirt road that was little more than weed-grown ruts until a tawny sea appeared beyond the brook and cow pastures.

A full half-section in extent, the field of ripe grain rolled away in a yellow-brown flood shoulder high, the tallest wheat within memory, headed by two-inch spears with dozens of fat grains.

Gus and Ed jockeyed the harvesters into the near corner of the field. Those long rows erect as soldiers would soon go down in a wide swathe. The three hundred twenty acres of wheat were worth over seventy thousand dollars.

Gus roared lustily as his machine lurched ahead and the blades whirred to reap, "Let 'er go!"

As if struck by a mighty wind, the wheat flattened against the ground in a great area that widened as the harvester advanced.

Not a breath of wind stirred. The air hung warm and fragrant, the sunlight lay mellow on ripe grain, meadowlarks carolled morning-songs, and the black crows cawed harshly high overhead. But the wheat lay flat, mysteriously, in a large strip. Beyond this strip, the golden ranks rose tall again, but a myriad murmuring issued from them like voices of invisible hosts. The hair prickled on Gus's scalp. He looked behind him. Not a stem had been cut by the reaper, and the full ears were intact. In a sudden vicious, unreasoning rage, he drove the combine ahead at full speed, and the blades sang a song of shirring steel, and the wheat went down in a racing band farther ahead at a faster pace than he could achieve, and the slicing blades whirred idly over the prone grain.

Then Gus and Ed stopped the machines and climbed out. Gus knelt over and bent his face low to study this extraordinary field. A patch sprang upright like wires, lashing his face. Gus gaped, popeyed. The veins stood out on his temples in purple. Somewhere within him something happened and he pitched to the ground, his face livid, as Ed ran to his aid.

NOT least among the remarkable events in Shawtuck County that morning was the saga of the fugitive potatoes.

The potatoes were only a small planting of an acre or so that Pieter Van Schluys had raised. They should have matured in early August but they didn't. They kept on growing and their tops got bigger and greener and lustier. Pieter was a stolid Dutchman who knew his potatoes as well as his schnapps.

"Dere iss something wrong," he solemnly told his American frau. "Dey haff no business to grow furder. Already yet dey haff gone two veeks too late."

"Dig 'em up, then," said the bony Gertrude. "If they're ripe, they're ripe. If they aren't, you can tell quick enough by diggin' a couple out."

"Ja," Pieter agreed. "But it iss not right. Potatoes, dey should be in two weeks already."

"Maybe if you weren't so lazy you'd of dug 'em two weeks ago."

"Dat iss not so," Pieter began, but Gertrude tartly gathered dishes and pans with a great noise.

Pieter blinked and rose. It was hard to have such a shrewish frau. In this *verdammte* America, *frauen* were too independent. You could neither boss them, nor beat them.

He rolled to the door and waddled past a silo to the barn where he took a potato-digger from a mass of tools. He leisurely filled a well-stained meerschaum pipe which had a broken stem, and lighted it. A couple of geese honked sadly as he passed in a cloud of burley smoke.

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Pieter paused by the potatoes to wipe his sweating face with a kerchief bigger than a napkin. "Gertrude," he muttered, "she iss no better as a potato."

Having expressed his rebellion, he dug and heaved. The tubers did not come up. Pieter strained, struggled, perspired. The heap of earth grew larger, but no potato appeared.

"Dat iss some potato," Pieter muttered. "Himmel, vat a potato it must be."

Pieter looked at his planting. "Diss iss not right for a potato," he spoke in reproof, and shovelled more soil away.

Had his eyes deceived him? Or had the plant actually sunk? He looked at the vegetable tops with thoughtful disgust. It seemed beyond question that the leafy tops were considerably nearer ground level than when he arrived.

"So?" Pieter exclaimed. "Iss dat how it iss? So!"

He scooped again. He watched with a kind of bland interest at first, then a naive wonder, and finally anxiety. It did seem that the potato was getting away from him. No, that could not be. He must have taken too many schnapps last night. Or it was too hot. He wiped perspiration off his face with a sleeve of his blue denim shirt. The potato was as far below his digger as ever, and surely his eyes did not befool him when they registered that the potato's topmost leaf was now at ground level. Quite a heap of soil lay beside it. The rest of the potato patch stood as high as before. Only this one pesky tuber had sunk, unaccountably.

Pieter dug deeper.

The mound of dirt increased. The hole grew larger. The elusive potato continued to slide below his digger. It was maddening. There must be a cave as big as the Zuyder Zee under this vegetable. He might fall into it with the plant!

His slow brain, obtaining this thought, brought him to a momentary halt. But no. Ten years he had farmed here, ten years had harvested. It was very strange. Pieter did not feel quite so chipper as after breakfast, and he certainly had not been jovial then. Pieter became stubborn. The devil himself was in this potato. The devil was leading him to hell. Or nature had gone crazy. Or he had.

Pieter shovelled and scooped, but the tuber dug down like a thing possessed, a mole, a creature hunted. The pile of dirt had spread far by now, and Pieter stood in a deep pit with the potato still below him. He had reached sandy, thin, base soil. He was angry and stubborn. He dug till his arms ached. He panted in Dutch and cursed in English. He muttered, he swore.

"Something iss crazy or I am," he decided and made a half-hearted plunge at the vanishing vegetable.

"You seem to be having some difficulty. Can I be of help?" inquired a polite voice.

A stranger stood on the rim of the hole. The stranger wore old corduroy trousers, a stained work-shirt, and a slouch hat. He had amused gray eyes. A briar pipe stuck out of his mouth. He twirled a golden key idly so that the chain wrapped round and round his forefinger. His face was full of angles, and a peculiar mark, not a scar, possibly a burn, made a patch on his left temple. By that mark, Pieter recognized him from hearsay as a comparative newcomer. He had bought the Hoffman farm a mile out of Shawtuck Center on County Road C somewhat over a year ago. He paid cash, and claimed the odd name Green Jones.

Pieter scowled: "Danks, but I vill manage. De potatoes iss hard to dig diss year."

The stranger's jaw fell open. "You don't mean to tell me you're digging potatoes! Way down there?"

Pieter felt acutely unhappy. "Ja."

"You sure plant 'em deep! Why don't you try for those nearer the surface?"

Pieter stared glumly at Green Jones, then back at the potato plant, now a good five feet below ground level, and still going down in the crater he had dug. Damn the potato! Damn the stranger! Damn all this business!

"Ja," said Pieter. "Be so kindly as to help me out."

Green Jones lent a willing hand, heaved while the rosy Dutchman puffed, and helped him scramble up. "Dat vas very good of you," Pieter thanked him.

"Don't mention it."

Pieter marched to the next cluster of

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potato tops, spat on his hands, and made a ferocious jab at the ground. His digger sank a foot. The tuber sank a foot and a half. Pieter glowered.

"Haw!" exploded the onlooker. Pieter glared murder. Green Jones chuckled to himself and blew out a cloud of pungent smoke.

"How you did it beats me, but I never saw anything like it!" Green Jones walked off in great good humor, a lank figure striding down the road, leaving behind him the aroma of fine tobacco, the echo of his chuckles, and a wrathful Dutchman.

"Potatoes!" Pieter muttered. "Himmel, everything iss crazy mit de heat."

Like the first, this second group of fugitive potatoes seemed to be burrowing into the earth. The magical submersion was too much for him. He reeled toward his farmhouse to drown his troubles in a sea of schnapps.

THE incident at Loring's farm was notable for its spectacular brevity. Mrs. Loring wanted to can corn. Lou Loring said he'd haul her in enough for the winter. Between other chores, he went to his sweet-corn field about ten o'clock with his daughter Marion.

Marion held a bushel basket and would have followed him down the rows if there had been any stripping.

Lou reached for an ear.

The ear moved around to the other side of the stalk. A weird caterwauling went up from the whole field and the stalks, standing ten feet high and more, seemed to shake.

Lou hesitantly pursued the ear. The cob returned to its original position. Lou batted his eyes. Marion gave a peculiar squawk and raced pell-mell for home.

Lou swore and reached for another ear. Did the whole stalk revolve? Or did the ear slide away? Was he out of his head? The furious sounds of the cornfield alone were enough to make his flesh creep.

Between the rows of corn, pumpkins had been planted. A few weeds grew, and a sprinkling of wild groundcherries. Lou reached for a lower ear and in so doing almost stepped on one of the groundcherries. The plant leaped straight up and fell a foot away. The roots moved feebly, began to sink in the soil, and the groundcherry rose gradually erect.

What with revolving ears of corn and leaping groundcherries, Lou felt that he needed a day off, to have his eyes examined. And off he went.

THE main hangout in Shawtuck Center was Andy's general store. On Saturday night, Andy usually did a whale of an illicit business in Minnesota Thirteen, a strain of corn that eager moonshiners quickly and happily discovered made superior whiskey. Weekdays were dead, especially the early days. But the way farmers began drifting in on this Tuesday was a caution. A dozen had collected before noon. Andy did not know what it was all about, but the corn liquor was flowing. There were rickety chairs, empty barrels up-ended, and nail-kegs a-plenty to hold all comers.

The universal glumness was a puzzle to Andy. "How's tricks?" he asked when Al Meiers came in.

"So-so." Al twiddled a cracked tumbler, drained it, clanked it on the counter.

"Something wrong?"

"We-ell, no."

"Here, take a snifter of this."

"Don't mind if I do." Al gulped the drink.

"You ain't lookin' so well, Al."

Pieter Van Schluys waddled up.

"Hi, Pieter, why aren't you hauling in?"

Pieter glowered at the speaker. "Dose potatoes," he muttered, "dey iss full mit de devil!"

"So?" Andy perked his ears. An amazing interest developed among the rest of the group.

"Ja. I dig fer vun potato and so fast as I dig, de potato dig deeper. Ja. I tink dere iss a hole so big as China under dose potatoes or de potatoes iss, how you say it, haunted, ja, else I am crazy mit de heat."

"I'll be damned," Al broke in, "and I thought I was seein' things. Listen!" He told of the orchard that walked away. Hesitantly at first, this big farmer almost pleaded for belief, and when he saw that the jeers he expected did not come, he warmed to his tale like a child reciting a fairy-story.

"That must of been your hired hand went

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by here like a blue streak in that old jalopy a couple hours back," Andy guessed.

"Yeah. Hank lit out. I don't blame him much. I don't s'pose he ever will come back."

Ed Vogel had a grim face. "I just saw Doc Parker. He says Gus had a stroke when we was movin' this mornin', but he'll pull through. Only there wasn't no mowin'. The wheat don't cut. It just lies down an' then springs up again. You'd of thought it was alive and knew just what I was gonna do."

"My apples ain't worth a dime a bushel now," said Al. "After they got through throwin' themselves around, they was so banged up they ain't even good for cider."

Ed wore a reflective air that turned to a scowl of apprehension. "Say, if things go on like this, we won't have no crops this year. We're ruined."

UNTIL he spoke, not one of the farmers had fully realized the extent of the disaster that faced them. Each had been preoccupied with his own worry. The fantastic rebellion of nature was a mystery. Now Ed's remark drove home understanding of what they were up against. If this was not all a collective hallucination; if they were as sane as ever and had witnessed what they thought they saw; if they had no more success in harvesting than they had had so far—then they were bankrupt, ruined. They could pay off neither mortgages nor debts. They would be unable to buy necessities. They would not even have food for themselves, or seed for next year's sowing.

"I wouldn't eat one of my leapin' apples for a million dollars," Al Meiers declared, and meant it.

"What are we gonna do?" Ed asked helplessly. "We can't all be batty. Somethin's wrong, but what? No crops, no food, no cash. Crops are bringin' high prices this year, but we're done for."

Andy peered over his shell-rimmed glasses. "Why don't you go see Dan Crowley? Maybe he could help you out."

"Good idea," Al agreed, lumbering to his feet. "How about it, boys?"

"Sure, let's see the county agent."

Gloom hung thick on the anxious group that faced Crowley.

"Take it easy, boys," Crowley advised genially. He was county agent for the Department of Agriculture. He was fat and bald. His nose stood out like the prow of a ship and stubble covered his jowls. He smoked black, twisted, foul stogies that smelled to heaven. His feet were on the desk of his office when the farmers came, and there his feet remained while he puffed poisonous clouds and listened. His muddy blue eyes were guileless. Dan Crowley looked harmless, hopeless, and dumb. They were deceptive traits. Dan had a good head. He just didn't believe in extending himself needlessly.

"So that's how it is," Al Meiers finished. "I'm ready to move out of the county now and burn the damn' wheat to the ground."

"Now, now, Al, don't be that way. You know I work for you all."

Pieter Van Schluys moped. "Ja. Vat good iss dat?"

"Plenty. Just leave it to me." Dan hooked his thumbs in his arm-pits and leaned farther back.

"You haff an idea?" Pieter asked hopefully.

"Sure thing. Now run along while I'm thinkin' about this. I'll get it straightened out." Dan was vaguely definite. The farmers filed away.

SHAWTUCK CENTER grew more and more restless as the afternoon waned and farmers arrived with newer and wilder accounts of the pranks that nature was playing. Andy's general store buzzed with anxious and angry voices. The population of Shawtuck County was made up almost exclusively of hard-headed Dutchmen, Scandinavians, and Germans who had settled through the mid-West during the great immigration waves of the late nineteenth century. They were a conservative, strong-working, sturdy lot. They clung to past customs, and some of the superstitions learned in the Old Country. The town simmered with tales of witchcraft and hauntings, of the Little People, of goblins and evil spirits.

What caused this strange revolt of the plant kingdom at Shawtuck Center? Nothing of the sort seemed to be afflicting the

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outside world. And what possible action could he take? He could at least make a field inspection for a special crop report.

Dan went out, climbed into his official car, and headed out of town on County Road A.

The land, under the warm, mellow light of the sun, gave testimony of abandonment, without the voice of any farmer. Harvesting ought to be in full swing, but not a figure tramped the fields, not a reaper moved. Here and there stood threshers, harvesters, wagons, farm implements, and combines,

Yet the fields, though deserted, were not wholly silent. This was a day of quiet, such a day of stillness and ripe maturity as often comes at harvest time; but ever and again, as Dan drove along, he saw strange ripplings cross wheat and hay fields, watched clover sway, heard a sound like innumerable murmurous faint voices sweep up from grains and grasses and vegetables; and one patch of woods was all an eerie wail, and infinite restless disturbances of flower and leaf and blade set the forest in motion; while the wild chokecherry and sumac nodded in no wind and shook for no visible reason alongside the dirt road.

Dan felt uneasy. All summer there had been little signs, increasing evidence, that a change had come over nature; and now the rapid and sinister character of that change became intensified with its completion. The trees, the plants, the vegetables had mysteriously developed a life and will-power of their own. And they had cast off the dominance of man.

Dan drove on through back roads, and twisted over cart paths, weaving in and out around Shawtuck Center during the afternoon. Everywhere he went, he found the same uncanny solitude, the constant whispers whose speakers remained invisible, alfalfa and barley and corn that quaked though no presence was near and rarely a breath of air stirred. The sun was sinking when Dan headed homeward, and it seemed to him that new and deeper murmurs issued from the bewitched fields and the enchanted woods. But he had learned one fact, and it puzzled him.

The phenomena were limited to the valley

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where Shawtuck Center lay in a bowl of low hills.

Returning to his office, Dan passed a group to whom Pieter Van Schluys was relating again the saga of the fugitive potatoes. "So dere I vass, fife feet down already, ja, and der man, de Jones person, he stand dere and laugh. Himmel, maype it vass funny as a funeral, nein?"

Dan wondered why anyone should be amused by such a strange occurrence. He went thoughtfully into his office and looked at the routine blanks and forms on his desk.

He could well imagine the results if he reported the facts to Washington. "Meiers's apple orchard walked away last night and the trees planted themselves around a pond on the Hagstrom farm because they liked it better there." And, "The Vogels' wheat refuses to be harvested. Kindly advise proper action to take." Or, "Emily Tawber's melons object to being picked. Does she lose her guarantees under the federal Watermelon Pickle Price Support Program?"

No, Dan decided, if he sent in these official messages, he would only be fired and replaced. His only course was to make a further investigation in search of a cause for the bizarre happenings.

He went to the wall and studied the large map of Shawtuck County. It showed the size and location of every farm, the variety and acreage of every crop. He drew a rough circle around the area of the phenomena. At the center of the circle lay the farm of Green Jones. Dan decided to pay Jones a visit.

As Dan turned in at the private road by the mailbox lettered G. Jones, he noticed immediately in the twilight that the land had not been tilled at all. Jones was no farmer. Only lank weeds grew in his fields.

Dan stopped at a gray old frame house guarded by elms and maples. Lights burned in the ground floor windows.

Dan heaved his bulk out with a sigh and lit the inevitable stogy. He rang the bell, and presently a tall, thin man with an angular face appeared at the screen door.

Dan said, "I'm the county agriculture agent. Mind if I drop in for a few minutes?"

Jones replied firmly, "Why, yes, I do mind. I've a lot of work to do and I'm pressed for time."

"So'm I." Dan blew a cloud of reeking smoke at Green Jones. "I have to get off a special crop report to Washington tonight."

"What have I got to do with that? I don't grow any crops," said Jones, frowning.

"Maybe not. Maybe you just help to make other people's crops grow."

A wary look came into Jones's eyes. "What do you mean by that?"

Dan said slowly, "It's like this. There's been queer things going on around here all summer. All year, in fact, ever since you moved in. Walkin' trees an' gallopin' potatoes and God knows what all."

Jones spoke with a tone of bored indifference, "I heard some of those wild rumors."

"They ain't rumors. I went out for a look-see this afternoon. Crops an' everything else that grows have gone crazy all around Shawtuck Center. There's a borderline maybe a quarter-mile wide where things are kind of uncertain, an' after that the trees an' such haven't anything wrong with 'em. So I looked at my map and saw that the center of that circle is right here."

Green Jones straightened up coldly. "Are you implying that I have some connection with these phenomena?"

"Implying? Hell, no, I'm tellin' you."

Jones regarded the county agent with a peculiar, shrewd appraisal. Finally, after appearing to weigh many matters, he shrugged and said, "You win. Nice crop detective work. I suppose I might as well take you into my confidence. I don't want a lifetime's work wrecked in a day." He stepped aside. "Come in."

The parlor was severely furnished. Besides a sofa, several chairs, and a desk, Dan noticed two prints on the walls: one of Burbank, and another of Darwin.

"Have a chair," his host suggested.

Dan sank into a wing-backed piece that promptly collapsed under his weight.

"Dear, dear," Jones protested. "That was a good chair."

Dan eased himself into the more substantial sofa and blew his nose violently to indicate that he was sorry but unembarrassed. Unfortunately, he dropped his stogy

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which left a scorch on the thick blue carpet amid a fine powder of ashes.

"My beautiful rug," mourned Jones.

"Sorry," mumbled Dan.

"Never mind. It's done."

"An' everybody hereabouts is done for the way things are goin' now." Dan steered back to his original topic. "Jones, I don't know who you are or how you done it but you sure raised hell with the crops."

Jones slouched against a mantelpiece. From far away came an insidious drone that Dan could not quite identify. His host idly twirled a golden key on a chain. He looked cool, slightly detached, and yet there was a deep passion behind his features. "Right. My real name doesn't matter. I'm a botanist. Some years ago I got the idea that vegetation seemed to show a sort of rudimentary awareness. It couldn't be called intelligence. I noticed how tree roots turned off and travelled considerable distances straight to underground water pipes. Then there is the fly orchid that acts with almost human ingenuity. It attracts, traps, and devours insects.

"I became convinced that there was a kind of dormant awareness in the plant world. It would be a great achievement for science and a possible blessing to man if plants possessed instinct and science could develop it to reason or at least the power of free motion. Then food materials, like animals, could seek a water supply and largely do away with the harmful effects of drought. I worked on that line. I didn't get far until other scientists discovered that ultraviolet rays, even the ordinary illumination of electric lights, could be turned on plants all night long and they grew almost twice as fast as other plants. Physicists found that various cosmic radiations produced definite effects on vegetation and could cause radical changes:

"Two or three years ago, I found that a universal radiation isolated first by Diemann greatly accelerated all activity of plants. I built apparatus to capture and to concentrate that radiation. I turned the intensified radiation loose on some hothouse plants and they grew like mad. I decided to experiment on a larger scale, and bought this farm because it was in a secluded district. For the past year I've been bombarding vegetation around Shawtuck Center with Diemann's radiations. You know the results—abnormal growth, mobile powers, and apparently rational, rudimentary impulses. That's the whole story. Now I've laid my cards on the table."

DAN knitted his brows. "You say the ray makes plants *think?*"

"No, I don't know that it does. All I know is that Diemann's radiations have always been essential for the growth of plants. I proved that by trying to raise flowers in an insulated hothouse. Nothing I experimented with would grow at all without Diemann's radiations. I reasoned that a concentration of the rays, if strong enough, might cause abnormal developments and hasten the evolution of species. I'm only experimenting and recording data as I go along. There seems to be something more than instinct developing, but it's too early to call it reason."

Dan said, "Hmm. Why did everything happen today? That's kind of suddenlike if you've been usin' this ray for a year, ain't it?"

The stranger shrugged. "Yes, but remember, I too am almost as much in the dark as you are. I know the cause of the change but I don't know the how or why or what. I must observe for years to determine these factors. Possibly there was a dividing-line. On one side stood inanimate vegetation, constantly but feebly irradiated. Then my concentration of Diemann's ray built up the change until its influences reached their climax last night and inanimate plants crossed the line to animation."

Dan suggested, "You might be smart if you quit now."

Jones looked aghast. "But my experiment has hardly begun! Think of what mankind may learn as a result of my researches! The whole course of civilization may be affected!"

"Yeah," Dan answered grimly. "That's what I'm afraid of. If this goes far enough, there won't be anybody left. Animals won't get no food except each other an' we won't have much except animals an' they won't last long. If the crops lie down or walk off

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an' can't be harvested, how're we gonna live?"

Green Jones looked thunderstruck. Dan could not help having a half-liking for him. He was obviously sincere, and evidently had meant well when he began his experiment. It was not wholly his fault that it had worked out differently from the way he expected.

"I didn't realize the change had gone as far as that." The botanist twirled his key, but his mind was elsewhere.

Dan stood up. "Jones, you're in a tough spot."

"Yes?"

"Van Schluys is pretty dumb an' so are a lot of the boys but sooner or later they're gonna start thinkin' like I did about why you were so tickled when he was tryin' to dig spuds. Or they'll pin you down on the map. God help you when the boys come tearin' out here hell-bent for your hide. You ruined their crops an' they'll tear you limb from limb."

For the first time, the botanist came all the way down to earth from his remote dreams, speculations, and theories. His face paled a bit. "That was a bad mistake on my part, I'll admit." The ghost of a smile hovered in his expression. "Just the same, it was a sight for the gods to watch that Dutchman pursue his fleeing potatoes."

"Take my advice and move out while you can," Dan said gruffly.

The botanist seemed unnerved. "As bad as all that? But I can't leave my experiment unfinished!" he cried shakily. "Besides, how'll I get away? My car's broken down."

"If your experiment's worth more'n your hide to you, don't blame me for what happens. But I guess this is official business, so I could use my official car to drive you to the next town if you wanted to leave tonight."

MR. JONES carefully, moodily, replaced the gold key in his pocket. He seemed to be undergoing an inner struggle to make up his mind.

"Where is the machine?" Dan asked out of idle curiosity.

"Next room." The scientist's indecision and worry fell away. He snapped erect. "I've got myself into a jam all right but it's too late for regrets. I'll take your kind offer. If you'll give me an hour or two, say till ten o'clock, to collect my data and a few belongings, I'll be ready to go."

"An' you'll turn off the rays?"

"Yes, I promise." His voice was eager, sincere. Dan knew men and knew that Jones would keep his word.

"I'll be back at ten sharp. Better not let anyone else in."

Dan left, jubilant over the success of his visit. He had discovered and he had eliminated the menace to Shawtuck County agriculture.

It was eerie driving through the woods. There was neither moon nor wind. The stirless air lay like a cool and weary sleep over the aging world; but the autumnal quiet that should have prevailed was missing. There were great rustlings abroad, and dark movements among the blacker masses of trees and crops, a continuous ghostly murmur issuing from the shapes of things possessed. The entire landscape seemed restlessly alive. There were voices without speakers, and slow creeping without breeze or visible agency; and Dan felt the impact of dimly remembered legends from childhood, about haunted woods and forests where witches resided, the Druids of the trees, the gnomes, and the Little People who lived under blades of grass and toadstools. It would be strange indeed if somewhere in the long ago, Diemann's radiations had been stronger when the world was younger, and all manner of growing things had then owned powers of life and motion that declined through the ages, leaving only ancestral memories for record until Jones brought back to nature its ancient gift. They were mysterious and disturbing activities that obsessed Dan as he drove toward town; and he was glad to leave behind him the soft and wailing wide whisper of inarticulate things, as the lights of the town drew near.

BACK in his office, having firmly shut the door, Dan cocked his feet on the desk and smoked interminably. A small shaded lamp on the desk kept the room in semi-darkness. The air became stale and bluish with smoke. Through the half-curtained

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windows, he watched figures drift by; arguing farmers; worried old crones; harassed and hopeless and blank faces, strong ones and weak ones, some dull and others furious, all showing the paralysis, the demoralization that the revolt of nature had produced. Beset by events alien to their lives, they were unable to cope with them, much less understand them. The only refuge lay in herding together and trying the forced gayety of town, with plenty of potent drink, as an antidote; as if the courage of the individual might return through combined strength and association with his neighbors. It was a night of fights, altercations, and bitter argument, and rowdy choruses from Andy's store.

Dan folded his hands on his lap. He had no desire to mingle with them until his task was finished. Tonight would see the end of the strange harvest, and tomorrow he could worry about the crop reports to Washington. The day's work had been strenuous, for him. He dozed, being one of those fortunate mortals who can snatch a cat-nap under almost any circumstances.

He could not have slept long. It was only just past nine when he blinked awake. He had a vague impression of some distant and receding roar, echoing through slumber to wakefulness; but all he now heard were the sounds of a few racing feet. The street outside his window was deserted.

Dan regarded the window and the empty sidewalk for perhaps a minute before a thought struck him with such force that he sent the chair spinning away as he crashed to his feet and pounded out.

The street was almost deserted. The tumult of less than an hour ago had subsided. A few broken windows, a picket-door hanging askew, some smashed bottles, and a couple of overturned kegs in front of Andy's store were the only remaining evidence of the crowd. The one person in sight was an old woman with infinitely wrinkled face and slow steps passing the Church.

Dan called, "Where's everybody?"

Old Mrs. Tompkins peered out of ancient eyes. "Eh? They all went out to the Jones place."

"What!"

"Lordamercy, you don't need to yell so. I ain't stone-daft yet. They're gone and much good may it do. Pieter was telling his story and I don't know who it was decided Jones could say a-plenty about these goings-on. I'm a religious woman, Dan, but I tell you, if it's this Jones who's the cause of all this grief I'd—"

Whatever she thought was lost on Dan who jumped into his car and sped off toward the Jones farm.

Dan hoped to overtake the angry farmers. He didn't know exactly what he could say or do, but he thought they would at least listen to him. Dan sympathized with their feelings. They had been baffled, scared, and ruined by the perverse results of Jones's experiment. There was a certain justice to any punishment they might inflict on him. But Dan could see the scientist's side too; his passion for discovery in unknown fields; his willingness to experiment, whatever the cause; his primary purpose of aiding humanity and increasing the general good. The experiment had got beyond control. Vegetation given a new power, had responded in a far more willful and independent manner than Jones anticipated. He could scarcely be blamed for the curious developments which had occurred. He might have hoped to benefit mankind, but the character of Diemann's radiations had ruled otherwise and given the plant kingdom a new vitality that fought human control.

There were differences and changes in the farmlands through which Dan sped. He remembered well the Hanson grapevines, but they had somehow vanished, leaving only torn earth. And the Ritter chestnut grove—of which no trace remained, save deep furrows.

AS DAN approached the Jones place, he felt a sudden tightness in his chest. A crowd of farmers surrounded the house, milling around.

Beam of flashlights and glow of lanterns cast flickering lights and shadows on alarmed faces. The surging mob seemed checked. Then, to Dan's amazement, they all suddenly broke and fled to their autos. They raced away, leaving Dan alone in the moonlight.

An ominous chill came over Dan as he

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stopped his car. A vast, dark mass, a writhing mound, engulfed the house. Dan got out and stood paralyzed for an instant. Forest trees and cultivated fruit trees, flowers and climbing vines, vegetables of countless variety, bushes and brambles and berries, representatives of all the plant life of Shawtuck County had converged here and overflowed Jones's place. And Dan heard an indescribable sound, a strange, eerie, inarticulate murmur of vegetation.

Now he heard other sounds, the sharp crack and tinkle of broken glass, the splintering of wood, and he knew that the windows and the very frame of the house were giving way. Suddenly there came a cry, a scream for help from within, and he barely recognized the voice of Green Jones. A great shudder convulsed the tangle surrounding the house. There was nothing familiar in the now loud, incessant, and threshing roar of vegetation; a weird tumult such as the wildest gale had never produced.

With unaccustomed agility, Dan leaped to the rear of his car. He habitually carried a variety of new farming aids that he demonstrated as part of his duties, products such as weed-killers, insecticides, fertilizers, and implements. Among these was a portable flame-thrower designed for burning out infected fields and blighted trees that he had been showing off in recent weeks. He grabbed it and aimed the nozzle at the heaving mass. A burst of intense flame struck and clung to the tangled foliage of shrubbery and vines and trees. Briefly, then, a sad sound flared up, like a many-bodied, subhuman, voiceless thing crying for life.

Now a great rent appeared in the mass and even the front of the house began to burn. Dan shut off the stream of fire but carried the thrower with him as he ran inside the burning structure.

His bulk was unused to such exertion, but he gave a convulsive leap when he saw the dark branches and vines beating at the side windows of the parlor, and watched a pane smash. He hurled himself against the door to the next room with a force that burst it from its hinges. He looked at a dynamo that hummed a faint drone on the floor near the doorway, its brushes occasionally sparking, and connected with an object that occupied the whole center of the room. It looked like a huge metal box. Its plates glowed with a pulsing and ghostly radiance that shifted between soft silver and the crimson of fire. Near the ceiling above it and completing the circuit by thick cables that pierced the metallic concentration box to whatever mechanism lay within, hung a globe between anode and cathode. The globe swam with blinding mist, a purple, impalpable force that streamed out constantly and almost visibly in all directions. The giant globe had a sound all its own, a peculiar, intense whine, at the upper range of audibility.

The rear window to the room had been burst, and a flowing tide of plant growths had already enveloped part of the machine. Jones lay on the floor, evidently knocked unconscious when the mass burst in. For an instant Dan used the thrower again. The vegetation burned into ashes, and suddenly the huge globe melted with a violent flame of purple and red and silver streaked with blue.

Dan dragged Jones from the burning house. The night air became filled with one loud, prolonged, and mournful wail that faded into an inchoate murmur, an inarticulate whisper, then silence. Gone now were the eerie voices and the purposive movements.

Only the crackle of flames and pungent smoke came from the dying house and the dead mass.

Harvesting of crops proceeded normally around Shawtuck Center the following day. The destruction of the machine had also destroyed the newly acquired powers of the plants and fruits and vegetables.

Dan often wondered about that last night. Had the growing things, impelled by some dawning intelligence, converged to destroy their creator, or to encompass and protect him and his machine? He never knew. While Dan watched the burning house, Green Jones must have regained consciousness. He had walked away down the lonely roads of night.

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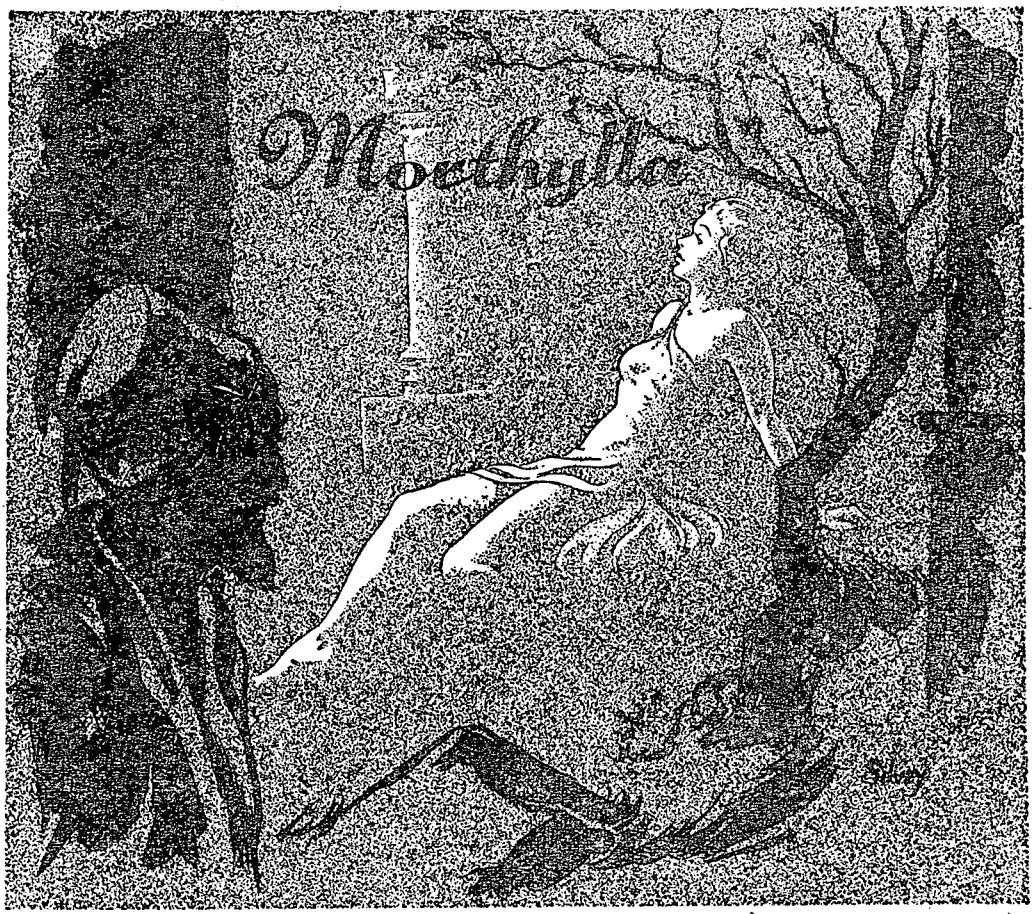
Was it not sweet to keep a tryst among the sepulchres?



BY CLARK ASHTON SMITH

IN UMBRI, City of the Delta, the lights blazed with a garish brilliance after the setting of that sun which was now a coal-red decadent star, grown old beyond chronicle, beyond legend. Most brilliant, most garish of all were the lights that illumed the house of the aging poet Famurza, whose Anacreontic songs had brought him the riches that he disbursed in orgies for his friends and sycophants. Here, in porticoes, halls and chambers the cressets were thick as stars in a cloudless vault. It seemed that Famurza wished to dissipate all shadows, except those in arrased alcoves set apart for the fitful amours of his guests.

For the kindling of such amours there were wines, cordials, aphrodisiacs. There were meats and fruits that swelled the flaccid pulses. There were strange exotic drugs that aroused and prolonged pleasure. There were curious statuettes in half-veiled niches; and wall-panels painted with bestial loves, or loves human or superhuman. There were hired singers of all sexes, who sang ditties diversely erotic; and dancers whose contortions were calculated to restore the outworn sense when all else had failed.

But to all such incitants Valzain, pupil of Famurza, and renowned both as poet and voluptuary, was insensible.

Heading by W. H. Silvey

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With indifference turning toward disgust, a half-emptied cup in his hand, he watched from a corner the gala throng that eddied past him, and averted his eyes involuntarily from certain couples who were too shameless or drunken to seek the shadows of privacy for their dalliance. A sudden satiety had claimed him. He felt himself strangely withdrawn from the morass of wine and flesh into which, not long before, he had still plunged with delight. He seeemed as one who stands on an alien shore, beyond waters of deepening separation.

"What ails you, Valzain? Has a vampire sucked your blood?" It was Famurza, flushed, gray-haired, slightly corpulent, who stood at his elbow. Laying an affectionate hand on Valzain's shoulder, he hoisted aloft with the other that fescenninely graven quart goblet from which he was wont to drink only wine, eschewing the drugged and violent liquors often preferred by the sybarites of Umbri.

"Is it biliousness? Or unrequited love? We have cures here for both. You have only to name your medicine."

"There is no medicine for what ails me," countered Valzain. "As for love, I have ceased to care whether it be requited or unrequited. I can taste only the dregs in every cup. And tedium lurks at the middle of all kisses."

"Truly, yours is a melancholy case." There was concern in Famurza's voice. "I have been reading some of your late verses. You write only of tombs and yew-trees, of maggots and phantoms and disembodied loves. Such stuff gives me the colic. I need at least a half-gallon of honest vine-juice after each poem."

"Though I did not know it till lately," admitted Valzain, "there is in me a curiosity toward the unseen, a longing for things beyond the material world."

Famurza shook his head commiserately. "Though I have attained to more than twice your years, I am still content with what I see and hear and touch. Good juicy meats, women, wine, the songs of full-throated singers, are enough for me."

"In the dreams of slumber," mused Valzain, "I have clasped succubi who were more than flesh, have known delights too keen for the waking body to sustain. Do such dreams have any source, outside the earth-born brain itself? I would give much to find that source, if it exists. In the meanwhile there is nothing for me but despair."

"So young—and yet so exhausted! Well, if you're tired of women, and want phantoms instead, I might venture a suggestion. Do you know the old necropolis, lying midway between Umbri and Psiom—a matter of perhaps three miles from here? The goatherds say that a lamia haunts it—the spirit of the princess Morthylla, who died several centuries ago and was interred in a mausoleum that still stands, overtowering the lesser tombs. Why not go forth tonight and visit the necropolis? It should suit your mood better than my house. And perhaps Morthylla will appear to you. But don't blame me if you return with a nibbled throat—or fail to return at all. After all those years the lamia is still avid for human lovers; and she might well take a fancy to you."

"Of course, I know the place," said Valzain. . . . "But I think you are jesting."

FAMURZA shrugged his shoulders and moved on amid the revelers. A laughing dancer, blonde-limbed and lissom, came up to Valzain and threw a noose of plaited flowers about his neck, claiming him as her captive. He broke the noose gently, and gave the girl a tepid kiss that caused her to make wry faces. Unobtrusively but quickly, before others of the merry-makers could try to entice him, he left the house of Famurza.

Without impulses, other than that of an urgent desire for solitude, he turned his steps toward the suburbs, avoiding the neighborhood of taverns and lupanars, where the populace thronged. Music, laughter, snatches of songs, followed him from lighted mansions where symposia were held nightly by the city's richer denizens. But he met few roisterers on the streets: it was too late for the gathering, too early for the dispersal, of guests at such symposia.

Now the lights thinned out, with ever-widening intervals between, and the streets grew shadowy with that ancient night which pressed about Umbri, and would wholly quench its defiant galaxies of lamp-bright

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windows with the darkening of Zothique's senescent sun. Of such things, and of death's encircling mystery, were the musings of Valzain as he plunged into the outer darkness that he found grateful to his glare-wearied eyes.

Grateful too was the silence of the field-bordered road that he pursued for awhile without realizing its direction. Then, at some landmark familiar despite the gloom, it came to him that the road was the one which ran from Umbri to Psiom, that sister city of the Delta; the road beside whose middle meanderings was situated the long-disused necropolis to which Famurza had ironically directed him.

Truly, he thought, the earthy-minded Famurza had somehow plumbed the need that lay at the bottom of his disenchantment with all sensory pleasures. It would be good to visit, to sojourn for an hour or so, in that city whose people had long passed beyond the lusts of mortality, beyond satiety and disillusion.

A moon, swelling from the crescent toward the half, arose behind him as he reached the foot of the low-mounded hill on which the cemetery lay. He left the paved road, and began to ascend the slope, half-covered with stunted gorse, at whose summit the glimmering marbles were discernible. It was without path, other than the broken trails made by goats and their herders. Dim, lengthened and attenuate, his shadow went before him like a ghostly guide. In his fantasy it seemed to him that he climbed the gently sloping bosom of a giantess, studded afar with pale gems that were tombstones and mausoleums. He caught himself wondering, amid this poetic whimsy, whether the giantess was dead, or merely slept.

Gaining the flat expansive ground of the summit, where dwarfish dying yews disputed with leafless briars the intervals of slabs blotched with lichen, he recalled the tale that Famurza had mentioned, anent the lamia who was said to haunt the necropolis. Famurza, he knew well, was no believer in such legendry, and had meant only to mock his funereal mood. Yet, as a poet will, he began to play with the fancy of some

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presence, immortal, lovely and evil, that dwelt amid the antique marbles and would respond to the evocation of one who, without positive belief, had longed vainly for visions from beyond mortality.

Through headstone aisles of moon-touched solitude, he came to a lofty mausoleum, still standing with few signs of ruin at the cemetery's center. Beneath it, he had been told, were extensive vaults housing the mummies of an extinct royal family that had ruled over the twin cities Umbri and Psiom in former centuries. The princess Morthylla had belonged to this family.

To his startlement a woman, or what appeared to be such, was sitting on a fallen shaft beside the mausoleum. He could not see her distinctly; the tomb's shadow still enveloped her from the shoulders downward. The face alone, glimmering wanly, was lifted to the rising moon. Its profile was such as he had seen on antique coins.

"Who are you?" he asked, with a curiosity that overpowered his courtesy.

"I am the lamia Morthylla," she replied, in a voice that left behind it a faint and elusive vibration like that of some briefly sounded harp. "Beware me—for my kisses are forbidden to those who would remain numbered among the living."

VALZAIN was startled by this answer that echoed his fantasies. Yet reason told him that the apparition was no spirit of the tombs but a living woman who knew the legend of Morthylla and wished to amuse herself by teasing him. And yet what woman would venture alone and at night to a place so desolate and eerie?

Most credibly, she was a wanton who had come out to keep a rendezvous amid the tombs. There were, he knew, certain perverse debauchees who required sepulchral surroundings and furnishings for the titillation of their desires.

"Perhaps you are waiting for some one," he suggested. "I do not wish to intrude, if such is the case."

"I wait only for him who is destined to come. And I have waited long, having had no lover for two hundred years. Remain, if you wish: there is no one to fear but me."

Despite the rational surmises he had formed, there crept along Valzain's spine the thrill of one who, without fully believing, suspects the presence of a thing beyond nature . . . Yet surely it was all a game—a game that he too could play for the beguilement of his ennui.

"I came here hoping to meet you," he declared. "I am weary of mortal women, tired of every pleasure—tired even of poetry."

"I, too, am bored," she said, simply.

The moon had climbed higher, shining on the dress of antique mode that the woman wore. It was cut closely at waist and hips and bosom, with voluminous downward folds. Valzain had seen such costumes only in old drawings. The princess Morthylla, dead for three centuries, might well have worn a similar dress.

Whoever she might be, he thought, the woman was strangely beautiful, with a touch of quaintness in the heavily coiled hair whose color he could not decide in the moonlight. There was a sweetness about her mouth, a shadow of fatigue or sadness beneath her eyes. At the right corner of her lips he discerned a small mole.

VALZAIN'S meeting with the self-named Morthylla was repeated nightly while the moon swelled like the rounding breast of a titaness and fell away once more to hollowness and senescene. Always she awaited him by the same mausoleum—which, she declared, was her dwelling-place. And always she dismissed him when the east turned ashen with dawn, saying that she was a creature of the night.

Skeptical at first, he thought of her as a person with macabre leanings and fantasies akin to his own, with whom he was carrying on a flirtation of singular charm. Yet about her he could find no hint of the worldliness that he suspected: no seeming knowledge of present things, but a weird familiarity with the past and the lamia's legend. More and more she seemed a nocturnal being, intimate only with shadow and solitude.

Her eyes, her lips, appeared to withhold secrets forgotten and forbidden. In her vague, ambiguous answers to his questions, he read meanings that thrilled him with hope and fear.

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"I have dreamed of life," she told him cryptically. "And I have dreamed also of death. Now, perhaps there is another dream —into which you have entered."

"I, too, would dream," said Valzain.

Night after night his disgust and weariness sloughed away from him, in a fascination fed by the spectral milieu, the environing silence of the dead, his withdrawal and separation from the carnal, garish city. By degrees, by alternations of unbelief and belief, he came to accept her as the actual lamia. The hunger that he sensed in her could be only the lamia's hunger; her beauty that of a being no longer human. It was like a dreamer's acceptance of things fantastic elsewhere than in sleep.

Together with his belief, there grew his love for her. The desires he had thought dead revived within him, wilder, more importunate.

She seemed to love him in return. Yet she betrayed no sign of the lamia's legendary nature, eluding his embrace, refusing him the kisses for which he begged.

"Sometime, perhaps," she conceded. "But first you must know me for what I am, must love me without illusion."

"Kill me with your lips, devour me as you are said to have devoured other lovers," beseeched Valzain.

"Can you not wait?" Her smile was sweet —and tantalizing. "I do not wish your death so soon, for I love you too well. Is it not sweet to keep our tryst among the sepulchres? Have I not beguiled you from your boredom? Must you end it all?"

The next night he besought her again, imploring with all his ardor and eloquence the denied consummation.

She mocked him: "Perhaps I am merely a bodiless phantom, a spirit without substance. Perhaps you have dreamed me. Would you risk an awakening from the dream?"

Valzain stepped toward her, stretching out his arms in a passionate gesture. She drew back, saying:

"What if I should turn to ashes and moonlight at your touch? You would regret then your rash insistence."

"You are the immortal lamia," avowed Valzain. "My senses tell me that you are no phantom, no disembodied spirit. But for me you have turned all else to shadow."

"Yes, I am real enough in my fashion," she granted, laughing softly. Then suddenly she leaned toward him and her lips touched his throat. He felt their moist warmth a moment—and felt the sharp sting of her teeth that barely pierced his skin, withdrawing instantly. Before he could clasp her she eluded him again.

"It is the only kiss permitted to us at present," she cried, and fled swiftly with soundless footfalls among the gleams and shadows of the sepulchres.

ON THE following afternoon a matter of urgent and unwelcome business called Valzain to the neighboring city of Psiom: a brief journey but one that he seldom took.

He passed the ancient necropolis, longing for that nocturnal hour when he could hasten once more to a meeting with Morthylla. Her poignant kiss, which had drawn a few drops of blood, had left him greatly fevered and distraught. He, like that place of tombs, was haunted; and the haunting went with him into Psiom.

He had finished his business, the borrowing of a sum of money from a usurer. Standing at the usurer's door, with that slightly obnoxious but necessary person beside him, he saw a woman passing on the street.

Her features, though not her dress, were those of Morthylla; and there was even the same tiny mole at one corner of her mouth. No phantom of the cemetery could have startled or dismayed him more profoundly.

"Who is that woman?" he asked the money-lender. "Do you know her?"

"Her name is Beldith. She is well-known in Psiom, being rich in her own right and having had numerous lovers. I've had a little business with her, though she owes me nothing at present. Should you care to meet her? I can easily introduce you."

"Yes, I should like to meet her," agreed Valzain. "She looks strangely like someone that I knew a long time ago."

The usurer peered slyly at the poet. "She might not make too easy a conquest. It is said of late that she has withdrawn herself from the pleasures of the city. Some have seen her going out at night toward the old

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necropolis, or returning from it in the early dawn. Strange tastes, I'd say, for one who is little more than a harlot. But perhaps she goes out to meet some eccentric lover."

"Direct me to her house," Valzain requested. "I shall not need you to introduce me."

"As you like." The money-lender shrugged, looking a little disappointed. "It's not far, anyway."

Valzain found the house quickly. The woman Beldith was alone. She met him with a wistful and troubled smile that left no doubt of her identity.

"I perceive that you have learned the truth," she said. "I had meant to tell you soon, for the deception could not have gone on much longer. Will you not forgive me?"

"I forgive you," returned Valzain sadly. "But why did you deceive me?"

"Because you desired it. A woman tries to please the man whom she loves; and in all love there is more or less deception.

"Like you, Valzain, I had grown tired of pleasure. And I sought the solitude of the necropolis, so remote from carnal things. You too came, seeking solitude and peace—or some unearthly spectre. I recognized you at once. And I had read your poems. Knowing Morthylla's legend, I thought to play a game with you. Playing it, I grew to love you . . . Valzain, you loved me as the lamia. Can you not now love me for myself?

"It cannot be," averred the poet. "I fear to repeat the disappointment I have found in other women. Yet at least I am grateful for the hours you gave me. They were the best I have known—even though I have loved something that did not, and could not, exist. Farewell, Morthylla. Farewell, Beldith."

When he had gone, Beldith stretched herself face downward among the cushions of her couch. She wept a little; and the tears made a dampness that quickly dried. Later she arose briskly enough and went about her household business.

After a time she returned to the loves and revelries of Psiom. Perhaps, in the end, she found such peace as may be given to those who have grown too old for pleasure.

But for Valzain there was no peace, no balm for this last and most bitter of disillusionments. Nor could he return to the carnalities of his former life. So it was that he finally slew himself, stabbing his throat to its deepest vein with a keen knife in the same spot which the false lamia's teeth had bitten, drawing a little blood.

After his death, he forgot that he had died; forgot the immediate past with all its happenings and circumstances.

Following his talk with Famurza, he had gone forth from Famurza's house and from the city of Umbri and had taken the road that passed the abandoned cemetery. Seized by an impulse to visit it, he had climbed the slope toward the marbles under a swelling moon that rose behind him.

Gaining the flat, expansive ground of the summit, where dwarfish dying yews disputed with leafless briars the intervals of slabs blotched with lichen, he recalled the tale that Famurza had mentioned, anent the lamia who was said to haunt the cemetery. Famurza, he knew well, was no believer in such legendry, and had meant only to mock his funereal mood. Yet, as a poet will, he began to play with the thought of some presence, immortal, lovely and evil, that dwelt amid the antique marbles and would respond to the evocation of one who, without positive belief, had longed vainly for visions from beyond mortality.

Through headstone aisles of moon-touched solitude, he came to a lofty mausoleum, still standing with few signs of ruin at the cemetery's centre. Beneath it, he had been told, were extensive vaults housing the mummies of an extinct royal family that had ruled over the twin cities Umbri and Psiom in former centuries. It was to this family that the princess Morthylla had belonged.

To his startlement a woman, or what appeared to be such, was sitting on a fallen shaft beside the mausoleum. He could not see her distinctly: the tomb's shadow still enveloped her from the shoulders downward. The face alone, glimmering wanly, was lifted to the rising moon. Its profile was such as he had seen on antique coins.

"Who are you?" he asked, with a curiosity that overpowered his courtesy.

"I am the lamia Morthylla," she replied.

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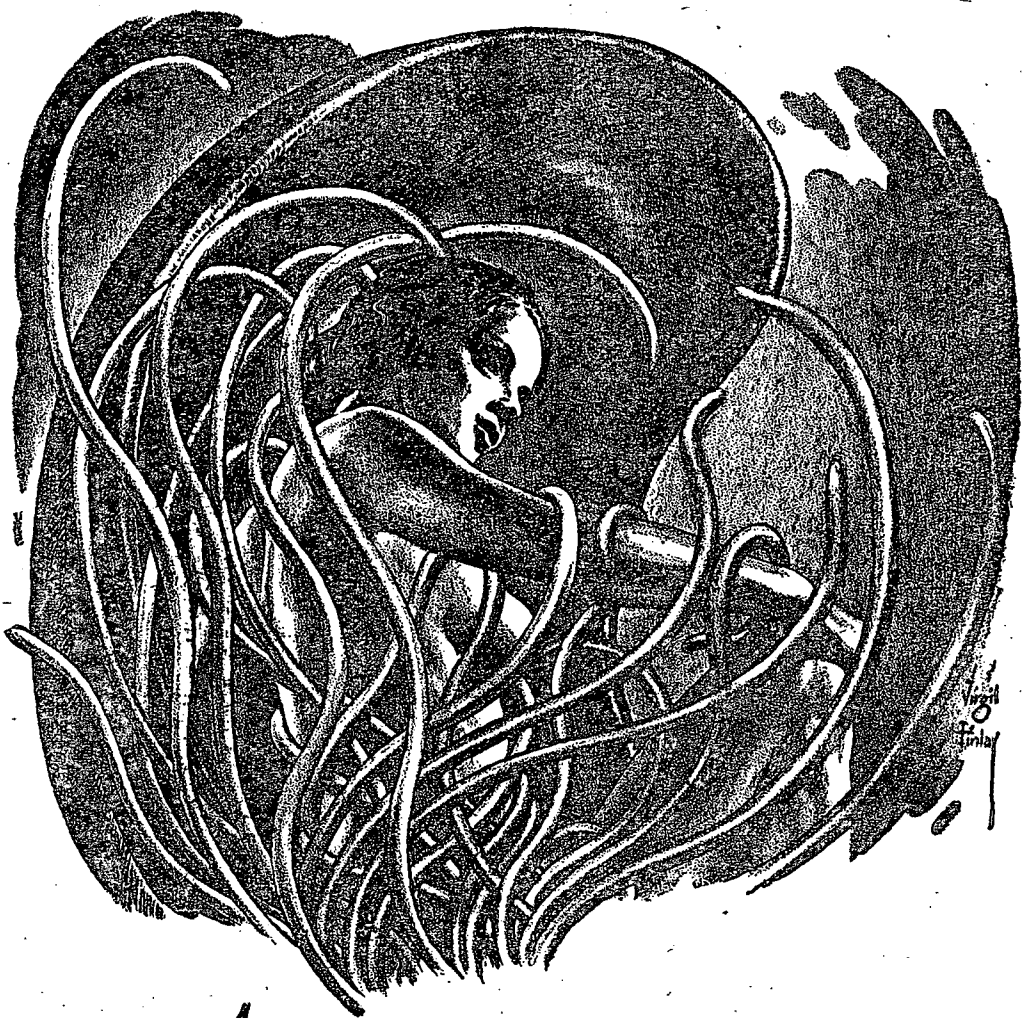
Had she gone on a vacation—or had she simply stepped into space?



A Corner For Lucia

BY AUGUST DERLETH

"PEOPLE disappear all the time," said Tex Harrigan over a glass of sherry. "People who just walk out of their lives and are never seen again."

"Dorothy Arnold and Charley Ross," I said. "You get those thrown at you constantly."

"There are thousands of others nobody ever hears about. Take Lucia Kent, for instance."

"But she came back."

"In a sense, she did—twice."

"You're quibbling."

"Not at all. Lucia Kent belongs in my de-

Heading by Virgil Finlay

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partment of queer people just as much as any other man or woman whose dossier has so many quirks."

"You were on that story, then?"

"Yes. The *Globe* didn't carry bylines then, you know, but it was my story just the same. Lucia Kent was a girl of nineteen, high-spirited, pretty, not long out of high school and working at a stenographer's job. She was engaged to be married to a young fellow called Carlo Marotti, and there was a hell of a row about that. Her parents were New Englanders transplanted to Chicago, and Carlo was an Italian; they were against him. Stuffy people, as I remember them. They were in the midst of a pretty acrimonious argument which had lasted the best part of a month when Lucia disappeared—literally vanished on a street-corner. That was the story, at least. Contemporary psychiatrists have a good deal to say about the transposition of the dream-world for reality, and Lucia had a keen imagination.

"The trouble was, there was one witness—probably as imaginative as she. A little girl was sitting on the curb there waiting for a companion when Lucia went by. The girl told the story something like this.

"'The lady came walking along and I looked at her and she smiled at me and I smiled at her and just before she was going to cross the street she stepped into a hole.'

"Now, there was no hole there. But it was not a hole in the street the girl meant; it was a hole 'up there'—that is, in the air. She gave a reasonably graphic description of Lucia Kent simply walking out of her sight into space—first her right leg, then part of her swinging hand and arm, and then her body; the last thing she saw was her left foot, up on the toes, in the act of beginning another step."

"Fantastic," I said. "But then, children have extremely vivid imaginations."

"Yes, and in addition, she had seen a movie in which something of the sort took place. *Topper*. You may remember it. It enlarges the possibilities of her imagination, you see. But her story never underwent any alteration, which was a little unusual; the customary tendency in children whose stories are the object of attention is to embroider steadily; she didn't. That's neither here nor there, however. Lucia's disappearance was genuine enough to raise holy hell between her fiance and her family. Marotti was convinced that her parents had spirited her into hiding so that she couldn't marry him, and they were just as positive that he had made off with her for the opposite reason. The whole thing was ridiculous, for she was past the age of consent, and if she had never shown any marked enthusiasm for Marotti, at least she had taken his ring and had agreed to marry him.

"It was a police matter, routine. I was down at the precinct station when the story came in, and I went out after it. The parents were middle-aged, highly respectable, with money—not rich, you know, but comfortably off. Marotti was hot-headed, fiery. They were literally at each other's throats, the parents cold with rage against him, and he on fire and screaming at them. A three-ring circus, you might say. The cops calmed them down and got the story, saw the little girl, got her deposition, and did all the things natural to do in the circumstances—checked all Lucia's girl-friends, her near relatives, hospitals, railroad stations, air terminals, and so on. There was less trace of her than there was of Dorothy Arnold, to bring her up once more. She might indeed have literally stepped into space."

"Just where did she go?"

"Ah, that's the question no one ever seems to have solved to everyone's satisfaction," said Harrigan, grinning infectiously. "The police found out nothing. Neither did Marotti in an independent investigation. Moreover, her parents hired some private eyes—a fellow named Blaik and his assistant, and they got nowhere. All anyone could discover was that one moment she was on her way down the street on her way to the office to work, and the next she was not; it was as simple as that. She had been seen passing a given point, she had not been seen beyond that. Houses along the way were duly searched; all known sex offenders were dragged in and given a quizzing, and nothing beyond the little girl's statement could be uncovered. What she said later made a lot of people believe that she had been off somewhere with a man and was

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covering up with the wildest and most improbable tale she could imagine. . ."

LUCIA saw the little girl on the curb, caught her smile, and smiled back. But she was not really thinking about anything within the range of her eye; she was wondering, as she had so often wondered in recent months, whether she ought to marry Carlo after all. His temper was entirely too easily aroused to suit her, for one thing, and he was so possessive, so jealous. A little jealousy was a good thing, perhaps. . .

Abruptly she was conscious that she should have stepped from the curb into the street at the cross-walk. She had not done so. She looked around her, startled. She should have been facing old Mr. Weintraub's house. It was nowhere to be seen.

Neither was any other recognizable landmark.

She looked wildly behind her. Street, curb, little girl—all had vanished. She stood in the midst of an utterly barren space which stretched away to limitless horizons. Whatever was solid beneath her feet gave no impression of being material to her alarmed gaze.

She blinked her eyes rapidly and stood stock still.

"I'm dreaming," she said. "I'm dreaming this and I'll wake up, if I just hang on." She was on the edge of panic.

"I am sorry," said a mellow voice close by. "But you are not dreaming. Someone is always forgetting to close these lacunae and these unfortunate events persist in taking place. You have simply stepped from your dimension into our own, which exists coterminously with yours."

The bodiless voice disturbed her.

Her alarm was sensed. "Do not be alarmed, please. We are not baleful creatures."

"But I can't see you," she cried.

"I think you would not be happy if you saw me," he answered. "If you will permit me, I will become visible in whatever guise you might care to conjure up before your mind's eye."

"But, I can't," she protested, panic still in her throat, an almost unbearable tension trapping her.

"There must be someone of whom you can think—a man, perhaps, who means something to you."

It would not be Carlo. All during her adolescence Lucia had dreamed of her ideal. He must be tall, blonde, broad-shouldered, well-muscled, intense and passionate, with a good mouth and blue eyes, someone gentle and considerate and yet firm enough on any needy occasion. He must be, above all else, a man. She brought him to life in her thoughts.

And there he was, shimmering and wavering a little, but plainly visible.

"Oh!" she gasped. And then, "Of course, you must be Tom."

"Any name will do," he answered.

Tom was the name she had imagined he would have. Carlo sank even farther from her consideration before this vision of maleness which stood at her side.

"Just where am I?" she asked.

"You are approximately ten steps away from the sidewalk you just left, except that the dimensional change is rapidly separating us from that place, and indeed, from all proximity to your own dimension in that place where you left it."

"Oh!" she gasped again, not quite understanding what it was he said, but assuming that it portended certain difficulties. "What in the world am I going to do?"

"About what?"

"Why, getting back," she answered, as if he should know.

"I'm afraid that will not be possible for some time. In about a month, your time, we will approach that place again, and you might try to step back. It won't be easy, but you could try." He did not sound hopeful.

"And how can I live until then?"

"Didn't you think I lived in any kind of house?" he asked.

BUT, of course, she had. Tom, her ideal Tom, would have a low, sprawling house, very masculine in its appointments, resembling a ranch, built of stone and glass and logs, modern with a traditional basis, and. . .

The house was there, coming into focus before her, beyond Tom.

"Ah," he murmured, "so that is the

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house. Let us explore it together. Will you take my arm?"

She did so. It felt boneless, she thought, yet it was strong. Brushing against him, she thought his entire body felt boneless. But, of course, that was absurd. Or was it? How could he walk erect without bones? she asked herself. He did not appear to be aware of the direction of her thoughts.

"Do you live here alone in this dimension?" she asked naively.

He smiled, almost sadly. "Indeed not. The place is filled with us."

They went into the house, and it was everything she had imagined it might be. Each room was perfect with the perfection of the ideal.

"It can't be," she cried at last.

"Yes," he answered. "Houses and living entities exist in this dimension. But they do not exist on their own terms, only as the beholder envisions them. Here you may stay, if you wish, until you can make the attempt to go back. We have had others, you know, many of them; most of them have not wished to go back. . . ."

"I must go back," she said.

"IT WASN'T quite a month when Lucia Kent came back," continued Harrigan. "And the question which soon presented itself was this—was she the same Lucia Kent who went away, or had she changed?"

"Had she?"

"Remember, I didn't know Lucia Kent before she went away. But the description didn't quite tally. Something had happened to her spirits, if she had been high-spirited, as she said. Not that she was without spirit—she wasn't that, either. But she seemed so uncertain at times. I interviewed her. What had happened? She had been 'away'. Where? She could not describe the way to get there. I recalled the little girl's statement. Had she indeed stepped into space? 'It might be,' she answered. 'Say I went away for a vacation.' Well, I pushed and probed and finally I heard about 'Tom' and that 'dream house' of hers and got the impression that something out of this world had certainly happened to her.

"Certain things she did lent some evidence to her claim. The very first thing was to break off with Carlo Marotti. He was all the more convinced that members of her family had poisoned her against him, but there was nothing even that excitable young man could do about it. He took his ring, made a scene, and left the picture.

"I had a hunch to keep an eye on Lucia, though I couldn't begin to set up and print what she had let slip. So I took to going around that way in the hope of encountering her or her parents.

"For a while, her parents were grim and close-mouthed. Her mother was the weak one, though. She couldn't keep still, finally, as soon as she knew for sure I didn't mean to print 'stuff' about her daughter. Lucia had changed. For the first three weeks, she had attended fairly well to her stenographer's job, but then the change had become more noticeable. All the time she had been moody and preoccupied, but now, in the fourth week, she was almost distraught. She seemed to lose her appetite, and she neglected her work. She had got into the habit of going down the street, to that corner where she had been seen by the little girl, and standing there.

" 'We're afraid Lucia is losing her mind,' her mother said at last in a hushed voice, as if she could not bring herself to say this thing aloud."

"A kind of dementia," I ventured. "It makes its appearance customarily at about that time—the twentieth year or so."

"I thought of that, but I discarded that theory," said Harrigan. "Don't forget, though, it wasn't my place to theorize. A reporters interest,' lies in facts. And it was a fact that Lucia Kent had begun to haunt that corner.

"I watched her.

"She would set out from that corner a hundred times a morning to cross the street, come back, try again. Sometimes she would stand there with an expression of the greatest despair on her face. I felt sorry for her. I mean, you know there are people who are caught in the grip of something beyond realization, they struggle and yearn for what seems to them an immediate, realizable goal, but everyone else understands it's beyond their reach. That was the way it seemed with her.

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"She was a beautiful girl, in a way. It wasn't as if many goals were beyond her. It was only that she wanted something with all the desperation of a lover. But that was it, of course. She was a woman in love, passionately, wonderfully. But she was in love with an ideal she had created in her own thoughts, someone she had nurtured in her mind for a long time, perhaps even since before puberty, since girls, you know, begin to think of ultimate marriage with surprising seriousness as early as the age of seven."

"Presumably, at twenty, a young woman has a pretty good grip on her world."

Harrigan smiled thoughtfully. "Yes, on her world. You mean on her external world. What about her private world?"

"There isn't as much difference as you might think."

"That private, intuitive existence of which men know all too little," Harrigan went on. "Lucia Kent had that. I watched her despair, her hope, her fierce striving day after day, whenever I could get away to do it. I got around to talking to her mother again, and I found out she had told them about 'Tom', she had described the days she had spent there."

" 'Days'?"

"Yes, she had been gone a whole month. Actually, she accounted for less than a week."

"Then where was she the rest of the time?"

"Let's consider that she may have been some place in which, as she said, 'time didn't exist'. In other words, she remained a month, but her stay was so delightful that she thought it only a week or less. Her sense of time may have been warped. Remember, that her story; either you see it as a logical unit, or you reject it in toto; but you don't question this or that part of it. Don't ask me about dimensions—that's Dr. Einstein's department, not mine. It's beyond me. I'm just a reporter, and I waited for a story on Lucia Kent.

"I got it, finally. On one of the mornings I couldn't get around to that corner where Lucia had taken her stand, she vanished again. I hightailed it out there right away, but this time there were no witnesses. . ."

IT WAS the same hour, the same day of the month, she thought, as she came to the corner. She hoped she would not attract the attention she had attracted other mornings, and that the reporter would not be there, watching her. She set out hurriedly across the street from the corner and found herself with the same abruptness in Tom's world.

There he was, standing beside the house, on the side where the roses grew, waiting for her, just as she had imagined he would be.

"Tom, Tom!" she cried out, and ran to him.

He took her in his sinewy arms, held her close, kissed her. His embrace, as always, was all-inclusive; she *felt* his arms enwrapping her, not only about her waist and shoulders, but on her neck, her legs, everywhere, so that she was cocooned in his warmth and ardor.

"Tom, you've got to go back with me. They don't believe me. They think I'm crazy. I want to show them."

"But how can you?" he asked. "Don't you remember that I exist only as people see me, unless I slipped and permitted someone to see me as I am? I think that would make you unhappy."

"Oh, no, no—you must come. Live with me there."

"On Earth?"

"Yes, yes, you must."

"We'll take time to think about that," he said, and led her into the house, which was just as she had left it—how long ago? Days, weeks, months, or aeons?

"THIS time, when she came back," said Harrigan, "she wasn't alone. This time no one called up to tell us about it. I suppose her parents were shocked when she brought back a young man she expected to have live with them. But no one had to call and tell us about it; we got the story presently through other channels—that kind of gossip which inevitably reaches our ears.

"It was small wonder. There was hell to pay. It was the damndest thing you ever did see. I don't quite know how to explain it because, outside of a kind of mass hypnotism which is beyond my actual experience, there

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isn't any rational explanation. The trouble was in the man she brought along and introduced as Tom. No last name."

"You actually saw him?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. Don't ask me where she got him. There he was. Tom. It's a common enough name, and she got it originally out of *Tom Sawyer*. The question I asked myself was whether he got it from her or by other means. You see, the trouble lay in how he looked. She had described him as tall and handsome; her mother had passed on her description, and soon the word got around, even before she went off that second time. Now, you know, nobody ever sees anyone from a word picture quite as other people see him, and apparently, in Tom's case, the most extraordinary thing happened. People met him, and each person who met him evidently saw him differently.

"When they began to compare notes, I'm afraid they got rather violent and vituperative among themselves—her parents, her friends, her acquaintances. Some of them saw Tom tall and blonde, some tall and dark, some short, fat, and blonde, some slender and auburn-haired, some tan, some fair, some stocky, some narrow-hipped, some broad-beamed, some muscular, some bony—they saw him, in fact, in every conceivable guise except the way in which Lucia saw him."

"What was your own experience, Tex?"

He smiled ruefully. "My own sight of him wasn't much better. As a matter of fact, it was actually a little worse. I had no very great or strong mental picture of this fellow, and the first time I saw her I failed to see him at all. But he was there at her side, all the time. Yes, I'd had a drink or two; I admit that. I came up to her and I said, 'Hello, Lucia. You've been travelling again, I hear.'

" 'Yes, Mr. Harrigan,' she said, 'and I brought Tom back with me. I want you to meet him.' And she turned to one side and said, 'Tom, this is Mr. Harrigan; he's on the *Globe*.' And there he was. I can't explain it. I could have sworn there was no one there at all, but of a sudden he came through, at first a little foggy, and then clear as a bell. He shook hands with me, and I gripped his hard; he had a well-muscled hand, very strong, almost leathery—so much so, I couldn't even feel his knuckles; it was all muscle.

"Now consider the power of suggestion. I had thought somehow all along that Tom had hazel eyes; I don't know where I got that impression, but you get impressions like that out of nowhere or from a combination of words or events which are related to something outside which then becomes part of the picture under discussion. And he had hazel eyes. I know I saw them. I looked into them and I swear to you they were the strangest eyes I ever looked into—like doors to another world entirely, like looking way out into the stars. But then she said something about 'Tom's blue eyes' and by God when I looked again, just to make sure, they were stone blue!"

I laughed. "But you had been drinking."

"Sure. Hazel is the color of beer sometimes, weak beer. Or whiskey. You figure it any way you like. But Lucia Kent's story didn't end there—oh, no; there was bound to be more of it.

"In ten days' time, after a good number of her acquaintances and friends had met Tom, there was such a to do in that neighborhood you would find it hard to believe. Lifelong friends were scarcely on speaking terms with each other—all over whether Tom was short or tall, redheaded or brunette. People who had always got along amiably, were at each other's throats—all over whether Tom had blue eyes or black, whether he was long and slender in his arms or short and muscular. And so on. It was the damndest fracas you could imagine, and none of it made the least sense. But it was going on.

"And Lucia was getting very tired of it. She had gone back to work with pleasure, leaving Tom at home by himself, but people's talk soon washed up around her ears, and she quit her job. There were wrangles at home, too, and only Carlo Maroti's having found himself another girl spared her his outbursts.

"The climax came one evening at a little garden party to which Lucia and Tom were invited. The party was given by an old friend of her mother's, who had been out

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of the city for several months. Now this old girl—her name was Francesca Brooks—was one of those queer people who lay claim to being psychic; that is, they admit they are aware of sights and sounds and things other people can't see, like a dog that hears a whistle in a register too high for a man's ear."

"I get it," I said. "Go on."

"Well, what happened might have had something to do with that. The fact was, as I got it from people who were there, Mrs. Brooks no sooner set eyes on Lucia and Tom than she keeled over in a swoon. There hadn't been a sign that she wasn't well; she'd been playing the hostess in the grand manner only a moment before. Then she heard Lucia's voice, she turned around, her face froze into the most horrified expression her guests had ever seen, and she went down like a stone.

"People all came crowding around her, but Tom was observed very quietly but firmly leading Lucia out of the garden and away from the party.

"When the old girl came to, she had the most beautiful seizure of hysterics any one of them had ever seen. They had to call a doctor for her, finally, and when she was sufficiently calmed down to talk, all they could get out of her was an incoherent babble about an apparition of some sort she had seen near Lucia. She had not seen Tom at all. What she had seen, as I pieced it together from what they told me afterward, was something that was certainly out of somebody's overwrought imagination—probably her own, an outgrowth of her constant boasting that she always saw the reality behind the mask.

"As an apparition, it was a dilly. It was a creature shaped something like an open clam-shell, with tentacles feathering out from both sides and weaving in the air around Lucia, as if it stood constantly ready to embrace her. Where the old girl got that one is beyond me. And what about Tom? How had she missed seeing him? You tell me."

"Well, what about him?" I asked. "Another sherry, Tex?"

He nodded, his eyes clouded. "What about him?" he repeated. "Well, I wish I could say. But the fact is, the two of them went straight home that night, and the next morning they set out for somewhere—her mother insists it was 'that corner of Lucia's,' which was what they had come to call it—and they were never seen again. They might just as well have walked out of this world."

He shrugged. "Funny, you know, about people like Lucia Kent. I like to think that somehow she and her Tom found that house she talked about, but how could anyone be sure? You have a hard enough time figuring how normal people act, but the queer ones never give you a real lead to anything."

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A Fog Was Blowing

BY STANTON A. COBLENTZ

A fog was blowing across the world,
and a fog was in his eyes,
But he smiled in the gray and fading light,
nor heeded the watchers' sighs.
"Free! Free! Eerily free! Free as an ocean
bird!"—
They saw a flutter of dying lips, but gay
was the song they heard.—
"Loosed from the dust and trash of earth,
I shall make a cloud my home;
I shall voyage the seas of twilight mist, and
cruise with the flying foam.
I shall haunt the vapors that wraithlike
weave high on the mountain's breast;
Float like a shadow through the woods;
and surge to the thunder-crest.
I shall rocket in sport on the clockless lanes
that wind among the stars,
Swift as a hope, and winged with the might
of gods and avatars.
And they, the comrades from of old,
timeless as rivers flowing,
Shall glimmer in silence at my side, with
great eyes round and glowing;
And people that gather far below, when we
flicker on the blast,
Shall shudder, and cross themselves, and
say, "What weirdness, what ghost goes
past?"
A fog was blowing across the world, and
a fog was in his eyes,
But he smiled in the gray and fading light,
nor heeded the watchers' cries.
"Free! Free! Eerily free! Free as an ocean
bird!"—
They saw a flutter of dying lips, but gay was
the song they heard.

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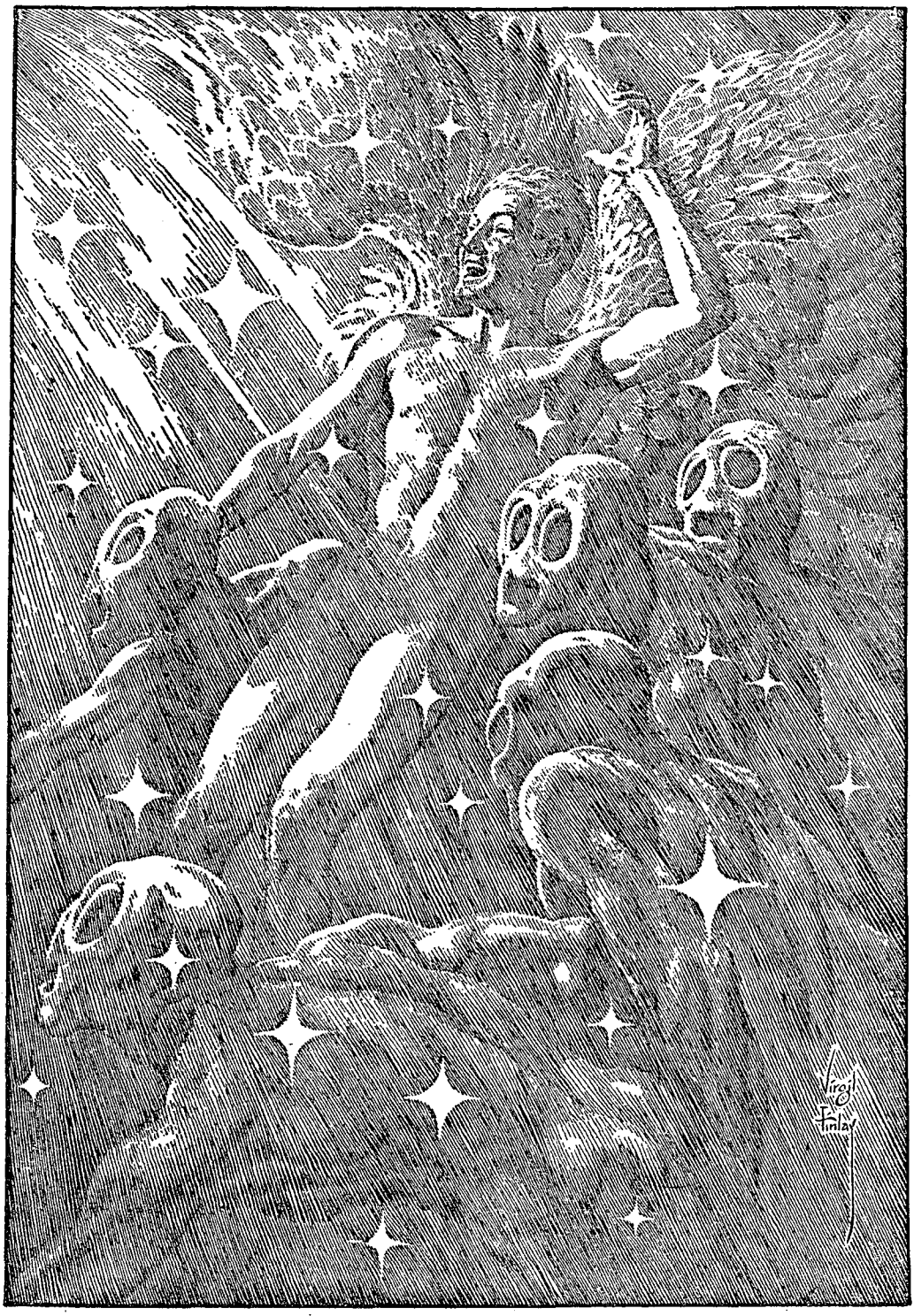

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Between Two Dreams

By Felix Marti Ibanez

THE poetical notions that life is a dream and that a dream is the foreshadowing of death, I can prove from personal experience. For my story is that of a man who, because of a dream, may be running headlong into death. I have only one hope: that what I am going to relate is not true; that the dreams I shall tell about are nothing but dreams. But if this is not so, it is possible that I shall not live long enough to finish this story.

I got married today—to the loveliest creature on earth, with the face of a madonna and the body of a Venus. This combination I know is rare, for just as violets are hidden behind ugly bushes, lovely souls are most often found beneath unattractive exteriors, as if God wished them to be enjoyed only by the most perspicacious of lovers. But my Yolanda is a treasure in every way and I could be the happiest man in the world with her. Yet, I fear I shall never know that happiness. Why? Because I am sleepy. And if I fall asleep, I may die.

It all started a few days ago. I was on my way to Yolanda's house. The blue of the sky was melting over the green summits of the palm trees. As the sun went down, the sparrows fell silent in the calm of the twilight. The little plaza across from Yolanda's house was quiet and cozy like an alcove shrouded in darkness.

I would usually leave my law office in San Jose late in the afternoon, have my dinner with a friend or client at the *Club Unión*, and then go to pick Yolanda up at her house for a walk. Sometimes her aunt would accompany us; sometimes we stole away alone and strolled through the park. Yolanda would tell me all about her piano classes and I would tell her all the problems of a lawyer; by then we would be completely absorbed in each other until the hello of some acquaintance or other brought us back to reality. When it grew dark we would go back to Yolanda's house and sit on the terrace while her aunt dozed, or Yolanda would play the piano.

Thus day had followed day and night had followed night for two years. There is nothing sweeter than courtship in a small town; one day follows another with the rhythmic regularity of a string of beads, interrupted only by a party, a concert, a visit to friends, or a short trip to Cartago.

WE HAD decided to be married on a Sunday in May—that is, two months from today—and we were going to occupy my bachelor's quarters until we could afford something better. We both agreed that it is bad taste to accumulate new possessions just for the sake of display. We preferred to enjoy the few simple antique pieces left us by our families. We have a coffee-pot of hammered silver sumptuous enough to adorn the table of a Peruvian viceroy; our table-linen is as white as foam and edged with the finest Spanish lace; in the living-room we have some large hassocks covered with tooled Moroccan leather, and the high straight-backed chairs in my study still retain all the subtle art of the old Castilian workmen who fashioned them; our library is adorned by books bound in soft leather with titles engraved in gold that glimmers under the lamps. In this simple peaceful setting we were going to live, love, work, and build a home we would be proud of. Truly, I was a fortunate man—until a few days ago.

As I said, I was on my way to Yolanda's house. When I got there, I stopped for a moment in front of the ornamented grill-

The terrifying question was this—what was the dream and what the reality?

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work. Have you ever been assailed by a vague feeling of uneasiness you are at a loss to define and yet never releases its grip on your heart? You try to ignore it, but it continues fretting you until it finally wears itself out or else takes refuge in the subconscious. At that moment such a feeling took hold of me. I tried to ignore it completely; I simply told myself that I was worried over something, but did not attempt to define that "something." I bent down to pet Zambo, Aunt Elvira's fat gray cat who looked up at me as if he hardly knew me, and then I knocked at the door. Yolanda appeared almost immediately; at the touch of her lips, I forgot my unhappiness.

It is impossible, however, to fool a woman who is in love with you. As we were discussing whether or not we should invite a certain couple to the wedding, she pressed my arm softly and looked into my eyes.

"Fernando, what is the matter?"

"Nothing. Why do you ask?"

"Because you seem restless; something is bothering you."

"It's nothing, darling, nothing."

"You're keeping something from me and that's not like you. Did something go wrong today?"

"No, everything went all right. Really, nothing's the matter."

"But your thoughts are so far away—Why don't you tell me what it is?"

"Because I don't know what you're talking about."

"You don't want to tell me."

"But there's nothing to tell, except that I love you more every day."

"All right; you have a right to your secrets."

And that was all. I tried to keep the conversation going despite her monosyllables. The truth of the matter was that although I knew she was right, I could not put my finger on what was disturbing me. I felt the vague but real discomfiture which often precedes illness.

"Fernando," she insisted again that night just as I was about to leave, "won't you tell me what the matter is?"

This time I surprised myself. I heard myself speak as if it were someone else, as if the idea which took form in ill-chosen words were being dragged up from my subconscious by a strange hand:

"I don't know, Yolanda, I really don't know. It's nothing serious—quite absurd, as a matter of fact. Last night I dreamed something that irritated me and you know I never dream."

"What did you dream?"

"I don't even remember very well. There were mountains, a very tired man and an Indian woman. But it's all so vague . . . I know it was quite disagreeable. Yes, I remember now. There was a forest and a couple walking in the dark. That's all."

I was surprised when she asked no more questions. We kissed good night and I left, quite reassured that this vagary would pass.

I arrived home and found it lonelier than ever. I wandered about the living-room, arranged things abstractedly, picked up *Don Quixote,* my favorite bed-time reading for several years, and, lighting my pipe, I sat down in my favorite arm-chair. For the first time in my life the immortal book could not command my attention. I read the words, but my mind flickered like the flame in an oil-lamp. Suddenly I felt quite tired, undressed rapidly, put the light out and fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

WHEN I awoke the next morning, I realized immediately that I had been dreaming again and I was assailed by the same strangely disturbing feeling of the day before. While I was having my juice and coffee, I found that I remembered the dream as vividly as if it had been a moving film, and that I could reconstruct every detail:

There was a mountain covered by thick woods, and the night was cold and dark, without moon or stars. The two shadows which were feeling their way through the darkness were not together. One of them was in front, a large figure, slow, hesitant, heavy. The other followed him at some distance and was small, agile, furtive. Shadows and crackling noises filled the scene. The sky was leaden and concave and unwilling to let a single star through. Occasionally the first figure collided against a tree, or stumbled over a stone, or slipped on the wet ground.

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For hours the two indefinable people kept trekking through the darkness. The countryside was invisible, but the labored breathing of the pursuer and pursued revealed that it was a steep slope which the large figure was climbing as if it were Calvary, panting and tripping, followed by the light, almost winged creature.

Slowly the darkness lifted, and I saw the first figure—a man—scaling a rocky, overgrown slope. I could only see that he was clothed in some metallic stuff, a hard steely gray quite different from the ashen gray which was filtering through the sky. The man staggered like a drunkard; he slipped and fell constantly. I could not make out his face or anything but his strange apparel like the bark of some metallic tree. He continually looked around; his movements were unmistakably like those of a deer being relentlessly stalked by a pack of huntsmen.

His pursuer was a woman in Indian dress of polychrome colors which stood out in the morning pallor. There was no doubt she was after this man and that she was trying to avoid being seen by him, for she hid behind trees and rocks to escape detection. She too looked back constantly, as if there were other pursuers and she wanted to escape their attention, too. It was a triple hunt; the man was trying to escape from the woman and the woman from other unseen figures.

When dawn broke with tropical suddenness, the countryside was lighted up like a dark theater after the play. The fugitive, frightened by the light, started to run and then stopped in his tracks. Like an animal at bay, with the Indian woman coming closer and closer, he brought his hand to his side as if about to seize a weapon, and drew it away with a movement of pain. Then he ran into a cave. The girl followed him right in almost immediately.

That was my dream.

THAT day I went through my regular routine, worked, saw some friends, and pecked at my dinner, feeling vaguely disturbed all the time. In the evening Yolanda and I went to the Municipal Theater to hear a Chilean pianist, but I did not feel in a receptive mood and the evening crept slowly and painfully by like an irritating chore.

When we reached Yolanda's house after the concert, her Aunt Elvira retired immediately, and we were left alone on the terrace facing the moonlit garden. Yolanda, instead of sitting down beside me, kept standing and looking out on the garden. I don't know why I preferred not having to look her in the face. As I was about to leave, Yolanda put her hands on my shoulders and looked straight into my eyes.

"Did you dream again last night?" she asked.

"Why worry her?" I said to myself, and aloud, "No, I slept like a log."

Then I bade her good night, and returned home, feeling ashamed of my lie. When I entered the house, I did something I seldom do. I poured myself a stiff dose of cognac. Then I sat down in the library with my *Don Quixote*, but I could not read, and kept staring at the reflection of the green lamp in my glass. Finally I drank the stinging liquor down in one gulp and went to bed immediately, trying to concentrate on a case I would work on the next day. But as soon as I got between the sheets, I fell asleep: the sheet was like a curtain that had fallen over my daily life and was raised again on my nightmare.

AS MY eyes opened to my dream, I saw the man I had dreamt of the night before lying in the cave on a muddy floor, trembling with cold. I saw him stir and heard him mumble unintelligible words. Darkness had already filled the cave when the man managed to get up painfully and groped for the exit. From his slow awkward movements I could see that he was sick. He brought one of his hands up to his right side, and the other felt along the rock to find some outlet. Apparently he had spent the day in the cave and now that it was dark, he was resuming his flight. Soon he disappeared among the trees. I then caught sight of another shadow coming out of the cave. It was the Indian woman.

When the man again appeared, a prong of moon had begun to shine over the horizon, chiselling the shoulders of his armor. The coolness of the night seemed to

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strengthen him a bit, as he continued the tortuous ascent. The Indian woman, behind him, seemed both anxious to remain invisible and worried someone was following them. But the immediate enemy was the mountain. Hour after hour the man struggled up the cliff. Silver-plated by the moon, the mountain seemed to stretch like a huge bear lying on its back, its rocks and trees like arches supporting the sky. Lurching like a drunkard, the fugitive seemed to be slowing down; it was hunger, fatigue, or perhaps pain, for he brought his hands to his side more and more frequently. The atmosphere was ghost-like; the night sinister; there was no noise but the wind in the dark trees. The silhouette of remote rocks stood out in the distance; stumps of trees rose like sentinels, hostile, threatening, guarding the ferocious mountain.

When dawn came, all energy seemed to have been drained out of the man; his walk was a continuous zigzag, a constant falling and rising. The Indian woman, whose strength seemed inexhaustible, was quite near him by now, as if she had lost all fear of his discovering her presence in his depleted state. When the horizon was quite pink with morning, the warrior fell as if cut down by one blow, and the woman was upon him.

The man was unconscious. With extraordinary energy she pulled him towards some rocks. Only the weak moon and I were witnesses to her feat. Occasionally she would stop to catch her breath and once I saw her face, handsome, kind, dark brown, with brilliant eyes. She finally reached a cave half hidden among the rocks and dragged the unconscious man into it.

It was then that I caught a glimpse of the man's face: *I* was the fugitive warrior!

For years I had been awakened by the trill of a bird outside my window. It was a tiny merry bird, lemon-colored and with a song as yellow as the lemon itself. Quite accustomed to his chirp, I would give him some crumbs of my toast. I remember my shock when one morning I found him lifeless on my window sill. It's impossible, impossible, my heart told me, while my brain fully took in the tragedy.

The same type of revolt overtook me that morning when I got up and found myself in my bedroom, with its white walls, facing a window blond with sun, my favorite books within reach of my hands, and my reproductions of Zurbarán and Ribera all around me. The dream was taking on most abhorrent aspects. I was no longer a spectator, but a participant, and I didn't like it at all.

That day was full of errands and work, which was a godsend. I had several visitors from Guatemala. I went to court. I had lunch with some New York clients, and had to go out to consult specialists on various matters. During the day I phoned Yolanda and her voice was so soothing that it seemed to melt the cold hardness of the telephone.

WE DECIDED to go to Cartago that evening to visit some friends. In the middle of the afternoon, I grew so uneasy that I could wait no longer and went to get Yolanda. I interrupted her in the midst of a music lesson. Finding a seat in back of the studio, I could see half the piano and a horrible little pockmarked girl conscientiously destroying Mozart under Yolanda's indifferent guidance. When the execution was over, Yolanda came up to me with a pale smile. She was wearing a white dress, with a string of amethyst beads; her braided hair was radiant.

"Fernando! What are you doing here so early?"

"I was hoping you were free and we could leave earlier than we had planned."

"But they don't expect us before seven."

"Then let's take a long walk first, and talk."

Without another word, she put her wrap around her and started to walk towards the door with me.

"Aunt Elvira has gone visiting and won't be back until midnight," she said.

The rest of the afternoon was quiet and pleasant. We walked, chatted like magpies, and finally went on to our friends in Cartago where we spent a very charming evening: we had roast suckling pig, salad, and plenty of claret; waltzes on the phonograph and songs by the little daughter of the house. When we started back in my auto-

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mobile it was quite late, and when we said good night Yolanda brought her face close to mine.

"Are you still having those foolish dreams?" she asked me.

"Yes," I said, trying to laugh it off, "I'm dreaming in serial form; now the hero and heroine are together and she is going to save his life."

"I don't like these dreams. You must be very tired. I'm going to take very good care of you when we're married."

"Then I'll put off finishing my dream until we are together. It's more fun dreaming in company, anyhow."

But the jocular tone of our voices did not succeed in erasing the vague sense of anxiety I had had all day. When I got home and sat down in my library with my books, which I could not even bring myself to open, I realized how enervated I was and had two shots of cognac.

While the smoke from my pipe rose in spirals, I further realized that I had worked especially hard that day to black out a truth which terrified me. I have never believed in premonitions or in omens or in anything supernatural for that matter. I have always led a solid hardworking life. People might say that my life has been monotonous, but I have liked it that way. I always leave my books in the same place, carefully shut, and never earmark the pages. I like to have reliable friends and an invulnerable reputation. My reading is almost limited to my professional books, the classics, and *Don Quixote,* for they embrace all the teachings of all the other books in the world. Just to admit to myself that for the last three nights I had had a progressive dream, was enough to destroy a world which I had built up with great care and which I had always tried to keep in sober perspective, subject to the laws, weights and measures I had in mind when I arranged it.

I did not even try to analyze my dream, despite the fact that under my friend Doctor Bances' influence, I had been reading the works of Freud; for not only had I found the books most unconvincing, but they did not fit in with my own personal philosophy. Instead, I preferred to anaesthetize my anxieties with another shot of cognac, although that is against my principles, and then get into bed, not wholly without fear. No sooner did my head hit the pillow than I was asleep and the dream started again at the point I had left it the night before.

THE dream started as I, the fugitive, warrior, regained consciousness and found myself stretched out on the floor of a cave. A fire was crackling near me. I turned my head and I saw the flames which filled the cave with smoke; there was a boiling pot which emitted delicious fumes. Near the fire squatted a motionless Indian girl.

My first impulse was to escape, but when I tried to get up the pain in my right side was so sharp that I fainted. When I came to again, the face of the Indian woman was close to mine. It was like a bronze mask, animated by the liquid emeralds of eyes so intense that I was filled with a sweet warmth. Her hands tenderly applied compresses to my side and I realized that there was a gash in my armor. I sat up against the wall as well as I could, and saw that she had covered the entrance to the cave with branches, even at the risk of our being asphyxiated by the smoke. An instant later she brought a metal basin full of some liquid to my lips. It was scorching hot and tasted of fowl. When I finished the broth I sucked on the bones which had floated in it. The Indian woman applied fresh compresses to my side while gazing at me with such tenderness that I was convinced she was my friend and ally. Soon a comfortable torpor overcame me, but just as I closed my eyes the Indian woman, who had been peering out of the cave, came back and motioned to me to get up.

I was angry and shouted that I was wounded and could not walk. She answered in some Indian tongue, as soft and melodious as the clinking of gold doubloons. I could not understand what she was saying, but her gestures were vivid enough. She pointed to the mouth of the cave and gave me to understand that men were approaching. Pointing to the dagger which lay at my side, she conveyed the idea that they were carrying arms and intended to kill me. Then she pointed upwards, implying there was no alternative but to keep right on scaling the

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mountain. When I asked her with awkward gestures why she was helping me, she put a soft finger to my lips and smiled.

So it was that, weary and ill, leaning heavily on her, I limped out of the cave and again faced the hostile mountain. Behind us was a forest full of frightening shadows. Before us were slippery slopes, treacherous ground, fearful heights, but perhaps safety. A moment later the first tint of dawn appeared and I woke up.

MY FIRST sensation was one of infinite weariness as if I had been debauching all night, a thing I have never done, not even in my student days. I groaned as I dragged myself out of bed, and dressing was torture. As I shaved, the mirror reflected the lines and yellowish color which are the products of insomnia, and not even the thick strong coffee could rouse me out of my lethargy. Fortunately, it was a bright day and the warmth seemed to neutralize some of the fatigue which stiffened my joints.

The day went by slowly, wearily. Yolanda was with her aunt visiting some relatives in Limon, where they would spend three days. That would give me enough time to pull myself together and perhaps get medical aid, for I was beginning to be quite convinced that my dreams were the result of a year of hard work and financial pressures. In the afternoon I got into my car and took a little ride all alone through the suburbs.

It was one of those triumphant afternoons, all silver and rose, which only Costa Rica can produce. I almost forgot the despair I had felt that morning. As I rode through a tiny village I saw a group of women and children sitting in front of a hut, chattering and laughing, with straw baskets full of grapes at which they pecked like happy little hens, and I envied them with all my heart. I had something to eat at an inn which was deserted except for a pair of silent lovers absorbed in each other. When I returned, a bit refreshed and more cheerful, the first shades of night had fallen and people were coming out to have their aperitifs in the cafes.

I went home and as the first star appeared, I felt so fatigued that I fell asleep after reading the paper and a chapter of my *Quixote*.

The laughter of the Indian girl awakened me. I had been sleeping in another cave which had probably been our refuge all day. For some time a thread of silk woven through the air by an invisible spider had been tickling my mustache and beard, and I had been making useless attempts to brush it away. Although exhausted and in pain, I could not help smiling. The Indian girl got down on her knees in front of me. The light which filtered through the underbrush covering the mouth to the cave projected silver triangles over her black hair. With hands as delicate as swallow's wings, she washed my face with a cloth dipped in the warm water of a pot boiling over the fire; she combed my matted beard and hair, and finally made me drink a warm dark liquid which revived both my body and spirits. And after that she applied hot compresses to my wound and helped me stand up.

Then I, the fugitive warrior, remembered that I had just had a strange dream. I had dreamed that I was in some city quite different from the cities I had hitherto known. The people were dressed in the strangest clothing; nowhere could I see any armor. I knew that I was in Costa Rica, for the scenery was familiar, but the people and their apparel were completely unrecognizable. I vaguely recalled that I had been sitting at tables, conversing with strange people, and making love to a lovely girl in words that almost sounded foreign. Finally I had climbed into a fabulous vehicle which, although it had no horses, seemed to pull itself along, proceeding at a speed greater than wind and emitting terrible noises. I had no reins and yet my hands were occupied holding on to some sort of wheel which seemed to guide the phenomenal coach. That was all I could remember.

We soon left the cave and we started climbing again. But now the vegetation seemed to be disappearing; the trees were shrinking in size, the thickets were becoming more anaemic, and stubble and rocks replaced the grass. It was as if the hand of some gigantic barber were shaving the mountain of its green beard. The moon shone pure, round and brilliant like a lantern. The

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air was cool and smelled of wet earth. Our steps resounded heavily on the ground which was beginning to be covered by frost. The Indian girl hardly reached my shoulder. From time to time, as I leaned on her, my lips brushed her hair, as black as sloe and as sharp-smelling as the thickets. She kept looking back all the time.

THE ascent continued in silence. I was beginning to feel very tired. The peaks seemed to be retreating before us. The sky was already beginning the battle between the blues of the night and the grays of dawn when my companion started to look for a shelter. This time we found rest in a sort of jagged hut formed by two immense rocks. I fell exhausted on the icy ground while the girl gathered branches and leaves to make me a mattress and cover the entrance to the cave. Shortly afterwards I was awakened from my torpor by the warmth of the fire. With wild berries she brewed a hot, strong drink which went immediately to my head. Then she sat down next to me. The flames of the fire danced in her eyes as, with hands as swift as squirrels, she sketched in the air figures of soldiers and Indians in hostile attitudes. I understood then that our pursuers were soldiers like me, guided by Indians like her. I imagined that, for some reason unknown to me, she had deserted them to follow and rescue me. I was so tired that while she was gesticulating I fell asleep again.

When I awoke, the early sun was tinting the rocks which sheltered us. I felt rested, perhaps because during my sleep she had taken my armor off. Her lips, close to mine, were murmuring in a strange tongue. In the crimson shadows, her face was on fire and I felt its warmth on mine. She ran her fingers through my hair, my hands caressed her face, and our lips met. The embers of the fire yielded only an aftermath of heat while her naked body reflected their light. Her soft moaning echoed through the cave.

I woke up in my room in a cold sweat. My first feeling was one of overpowering fear; I had had a dream within a dream—like those paintings that depict a picture within the picture—and the dream within my dream had represented my daily life right here and now in San Jose. It was enough to drive me mad.

I got up trembling, went to the living-room, poured myself a drink and sat down by the open window. A blacksmith was pounding an anvil in each temple. It could not be: I was living between two dreams. I was beginning to lose my hold on reality. What was real and what was a dream? Were my days real and my nights dreams, or was what I had hitherto taken to be my real life a dream and my dreams my real life? Which was my true personality? Was I a lawyer in San Jose about to get married, or was I a fugitive Spanish soldier who had just made love to an Indian girl in a cave? At night I dreamed that I was one of the *Conquistadores*, yet during the day while sleeping in a cave I dreamed that I was another man in some future period. My night-dreams were retrograde, but the dream within those dreams was prophetic of the future. Which was a dream?

I SPENT hours torturing myself with these questions. When I had finished all the cognac, I still felt no relief. I did not know what to do. Three times I picked up the phone to call Yolanda in Puerto Limon and then hung up again. For the truth was that my dreams had more power over me already than my daily life. The hours I spent at the office and—what blasphemy!—the hours I spent with Yolanda, were now pale images compared with that moment of love I had just had with the Indian girl in a cave, with the danger of death hovering all around us. With shame I discovered that I preferred this strange girl who spoke an outlandish tongue to the Yolanda who was to be my wife soon, and the hazardous existence of a tracked animal was more fascinating than my life as a respectable lawyer. There was no longer any distinction between day and night. Both were dreams, only one was much more romantic and intriguing than the other. But the terrifying question was this; what was the dream and what the reality? I told myself over and over that I was the victim of an inexplicable network of nightmares, yet these nightmares seemed more real than my waking life.

Vaguely I recall the day that followed

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that awful night. I made an effort to put my affairs in order. I remember I finally dropped everything and went out and walked for hours. San Jose was spread out, happy and placid, under the rising sun. Things around me loomed with a newly acquired importance, as if they wanted to be noticed, to tell me that *they* were real. The sparrows were chirping on the roofs; there were beggars on the corners and pious old women in the churches, a solitary dog was looking up at the sky, and a sentimental seamstress was gazing out on the street through her window. Life was good, quiet, cheerful, under that radiant sun which gives light to the sky and warmth to our veins.

When night fell and I went to bed, I tried to analyze how my dream had begun, but I couldn't. As soon as I lay down I fell asleep, only to open my eyes in the same cave, with the Indian girl's hair, smelling of dry leaves, brushing by my lips.

This time my dream was intense, quick, brutally concise. The girl and I woke up as a ray of the moon played over her face. I remember we embraced again and I could almost taste the moon on her lips. When we crawled out of our cave, the tree stumps and jutting rocks had almost totally blended into the darkness.

Holding each other by the hand, we advanced with greater energy than the previous night, as if love had lent wings to our tired feet. What followed happened so suddenly we could not make out from what side we were attacked. As we entered a narrow passage bordered by craggy rocks rising to the top of the mountain, we heard shouts and alarms in the distance. Like two stags at bay, we looked about in panic for a place to hide. The night was becoming colder, yet we were sweating with fear.

Then we saw some shadows outlined on a mound, heard the sound of taut strings like maddened hornets, and I felt something like the blow of a fist on my shoulder. We were running desperately up the mountain, slipping, falling, getting up, protected by the darkness, betrayed by the moon, crawling under rocks, climbing over boulders, zigzagging on flat land. But we were forever ascending, as if only the sky could afford us protection. Blood was flowing from my shoulder down to my hand, and like a wolf I licked my palm with my tongue. A weapon still stuck in my flesh, but I did not dare to stop to pull it out.

When I finally stopped, about to faint, I felt the Indian girl dragging me into a cave. Our bodies dropped on the wet ground. I writhed in pain while the girl bent over me. Her hands fluttered over my shoulder, and I groaned in agony. A second later she had a strange weapon in her hands. An arrow, a strange arrow, with a triangular head and four more heads on each point of the triangle. I could see the blood flowing from my wound, fortunately not very deep, as she bound it with a strip of cloth. Only then could I discern in the light of the moon that she too was wounded. Her right hand was pierced right through by an arrow and the wound was wide and raw like a bloody mouth. Our lips united in a kiss which tasted of blood. And I woke up.

FOR the first time since I had started having my terrible nightmares, my waking was neither sudden nor clear-cut. Up to then, my days and nights, my life during the day and the life I led at night—for I dare not say dream and reality—were separated by the opening of my eyes. This time it was wholly different. I opened my eyes in my bedroom but something of my dream still held over. Instead of feeling that everything about my dream had faded, except the memory of it, it seemed to me that I was still connected to it by some invisible thread. I sat up in bed unable to make out what was the matter, but as I lifted my hand to press my forehead, I realized what it was. My pajamas over my right shoulder were bloody. With a jerk I bared my shoulder: right at the collar bone there was a triangular wound with four small tears on each point, all covered by fresh blood.

Uttering a cry of panic, I leaped out of bed, ran to the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror, unable to accept the full impact of reality. I placed a finger on the wound, smelled and licked the blood, and finally, with a wrench, had to admit to myself that I had been wounded by a dream.

Moaning with horror, I bandaged myself with a handkerchief. I was not bleeding

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much but I had a good deal of pain. Almost without thinking I ran out of the house, jumped into my car and drove in the direction of the house of my good friend, Dr. Aunas. Half way there, I changed my mind and making an abrupt turn I made straight for the house of Dr. Bances, head psychiatrist of the Chapui Hospital. If my wound had really been inflicted mentally, only a psychiatrist could cure me.

I clung to the wheel trying not to think, not to remember, not to understand, in a word, not to accept, otherwise my reason would go. Everything that had happened to me had to have some logical explanation. No, I was living right here in San Jose, in Costa Rica, in the twentieth century. It was all a dream, a nightmare, but a more apalling nightmare than Edgar Allan Poe could ever have imagined.

My brain throbbed even more fiercely than the ill-bandaged wound in my shoulder. It can't be, it can't be, I kept telling myself; that nightmares of endless flight over rocky mountain should leave me exhausted and beaten, that was understandable, but that a dream about being wounded by an arrow in the shoulder should end in my awakening with a bloody wound in the very same place and of the very same type that I had dreamed, that was utterly impossible.

My friend Bances ushered me into his office immediately. Knowing his sybaritic habits, I guessed that he must have been having breakfast in bed when I arrived, but in Costa Rica friendship is friendship. His obesity overflowed the sumptuous robe he was wearing. He was unshaven, his hair uncombed, and his eyes still full of sleep. On the lapel of his robe were perched some brown toast crumbs and his mustache was wet with coffee. The office—large, dark, rich with pictures and statuettes—was cool and peaceful. Without a word, I took off my coat and shirt and showed him the wound.

HE LOOKED at it but made no comment. I could see the wound in a mirror—triangular with torn ends, the blood dried but oozing a pink watery substance—as his experienced hands felt around it, washed it, disinfected it, and applied a salve and bandages. Then he helped me put my coat on and offered me a shot of whiskey, which I accepted, and a cigar which I refused. He went out for a moment and came back with a silver tray holding a coffeepot, two cups, spoons and a sugar bowl. He served me, then helped himself, lit a cigar, and sat down facing me, now totally awake, like a jovial, self-satisfied Buddha.

Clever psychiatrist that he was, he asked me no questions and used his silence to force me to speak. I told him everything, from the very beginning, but contrary to my expectations, telling him relieved me in no way. My voice sounded as if someone else were speaking and the story became even more fantastic. I did not believe it myself and felt that nobody else would believe it either. Bances never interrupted me and only when I finished did he put out his cigar with a resolute gesture.

"Fernando," he said, "we have known each other for many years, since our student days in Madrid, and we have been loyal friends. That is why I do not want to treat you like a patient off the street. What you have just told me is fantastic and without precedent, and if anyone else had come to me with such a tale, I would consider him a paranoiac, a schizophrenic, or a victim of hallucinations. But I know you very well. The fact that you did not go to a doctor to have your wound treated and instead came to me, a psychiatrist who scarcely knows how to make a bandage, means that for you the mental wound, the psychic lesion, is more important than the actual flesh wound. That, plus the coherence of your story is enough to convince me of your sanity.

"I'm afraid that I shall not be able to help you very much, except in one thing. You are sane, I would even say as sane as I, if I weren't, like so many people, as mad as a hatter. You are as normal as any of us can be, living in these mad times. Your fear of insanity is your certificate of mental health. But that doesn't satisfy you. Even though I pronounce you sane, you are disturbed in some way.

"You would like an explanation and I'd like to give you one, but frankly I don't know what to say. If you were ill, it would be something else. But under these circumstances I really don't know what to tell you.

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Overworked and suffering from the inevitable emotional strain of your coming marriage, you are having a nightmare which, as an unfortunate result of our mechanized psychic machine, has got hold of you and plays itself out in episodes every time you fall asleep. That gives you the feeling that you are living a double life. But don't worry. You are awake now. You are with me, your fat friend Bances. And you must realize this: what you experience while asleep is only a dream and *this right here* is reality. However, reality and fantasy have become so mixed up in your life that you don't know exactly when you are awake and when you are asleep.

"But just how did your dream become physical reality? Right now I cannot analyze the contents of your dream. I'm leaving for Panama by plane in about two hours to take care of a very serious case—a relative of a cabinet minister—but I shall be back at the latest in two days and we'll immediately start to psychoanalyze your dream. I don't know why you chose such a historical fantasy as your theme, but the essential thing is to find out why a nightmare has become a real wound, with real blood. I can offer you two tentative explanations: one is the effect of dreams on our organism. I might quote you thousands of cases—with the help of my books, of course—of people who dreamed of something and then woke up to find their dreams had come true psychosomatically. Some dreamed they had become blind, others paralyzed, deaf, mute, and awoke with those very defects. Of course, it only lasted for a short while, until the effect of the dream on the mind of the individual wore off.

"We know that the mind can create stigmas. Saint Theresa dreamed she was living through the passion of Christ and woke up with her hands and feet pierced, simply proving that the mind is all-powerful and can translate dreams or suggestions into actualities like wounds or blood. We have been able by hypnosis to open wounds in the flesh, redden areas of the skin, and even paralyze people or anaesthetize zones of the body to pain or shock. In the same way, a dream can have an effect on the body and create actual lesions.

"Unfortunately, we cannot explain your dream that easily. Skin wounds and lesions, which we call stigmata by analogy with those of Saint Theresa are amorphous, ill-defined lesions. They are sores and ulcers more than wounds. Yours is a wound made by some cutting instrument, there's no doubt of it. You say it was caused by an arrow. I can assure you—and any surgeon will substantiate what I say—that this lesion," and his thick fleshy finger like a sausage pointed to my shoulder, "is not the result of a dream. It was made by a sharp instrument. I know enough anthropology to identify the instrument too. You were wounded by an arrow which was used three centuries ago by the Indian tribes that lived in the region around the Irazu volcano.

"No, don't be alarmed. I'm not feeding you more terrors. I have another explanation. When you fell asleep and dreamed, your nightmare was so strong that under its effect you subconsciously wanted to dramatize it on your own body. If you had dreamed that you had leprous ulcers you would have got up with ulcers brought about solely by the effect of your mind on your body; for our bodies are just wax moulded by our psyche. But you dreamed that you were wounded by an arrow and I think that during an attack of somnambulism you got up and you went somewhere—God only knows where!—where you could find this type of arrow—maybe some museum—and you inflicted a wound on yourself. It was an unconscious self-mutilation which you cannot remember, and you did it just to translate the fantasy of your nightmare into a real image."

There was a drawn-out silence. For the first time I grew aware of the tictac of an enormous grandfather clock. The brilliant sun outside forced its bars of gold though the drawn Venetian blinds into the room. The aroma of coffee blended with tobacco smoke. My shoulder pained terribly. I looked Bances straight in the face, but he avoided my eyes.

"Bances—"

"Yes?" he said, without looking at me.

"Bances, I want to ask you one thing."

"Go ahead."

"I want the truth."

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"What is it?"

"Have you ever testified in court in your capacity as a psychiatrist?"

"You know I have."

"Do you claim to be an authority on self-inflicted wounds?"

"I often have to give testimony concerning such things."

"Then don't beat around the bush. You've seen my wound and its position on my body. Let us assume I could get this type of arrow which no longer exists except in museums. Was it humanly possible for me—asleep or awake—to wound myself this way?"

Silence. More smoke. The beat of the clock was one with the triple beat of my wound, my heart, and my brain.

"Fernando, you could not have wounded yourself. It was caused by an arrow shot from a great distance."

I LEFT Bances despite his offer to stay in town and take care of me; I promised him to consult a surgeon friend of his and then come back to see him as soon as he returned. With difficulty I persuaded him to let me go. Like a well-trained automaton I went to my office, took care of the mail, had lunch, and went back to work. When I closed the office I let out a sigh of relief and another of anguish. Before me now yawned the prospect of another night of dreams; I would again be submerged in a fearful confused world of terrors and anxieties. But there was one compensation: I would see the Indian girl.

After having dinner at the club, I started home. The irony of the situation struck me fully when some neighbors, on their way to the movies, greeted me with their usual friendliness. How could they understand that as soon as I closed my eyes I would be whisked away from San Jose and back three centuries to a world where men were hounded like animals, and where one loved, lived, and died savagely; where the respectable San Jose lawyer became a hirsute bearded soldier, fleeing into nowhere, led by an Indian girl of passionate body and eloquent eyes?

Back in my study, I telephoned Puerto Limon. Yolanda's voice was full of anxiety.

"Darling," she said, "I expected you to call yesterday. Why didn't you? How do you feel?"

"I'm fine—everything is fine," I lied. "But if you want a honeymoon, I have to work hard now. I'm settling all sorts of details, running around day and night, so I can have some time alone with you later."

A pause. Her silence froze my false heartiness.

"Yolanda, are you there?"

"Of course. But I'm worried. Are you really all right?"

"Silly girl! Of course I am. Why do you ask? Oh, I'm a little tired, but that's natural. When are you coming back? I miss you so!"

"I'll be back tomorrow. But if you need me now . . . Tell me! I want you to swear that you're all right."

There was no doubt about it. She knew that something was wrong.

"Word of honor, Yolanda. Except that without you, San Jose is a desert and I am lost in it."

After a few more words of farewell, the conversation came to an end.

I hung up the receiver and walked to the window. The night had come softly, almost on tiptoe, like a discreet lady's maid. The sleeping garden throbbed quietly under the blinking stars. The perfume of the jasmine seemed to rise to the distant constellations. An invisible frog was croaking at the blue clean star which, like a street-lamp, hung over my garden. The whisper of a fountain was lulling. Suddenly I was aware that no longer did I see the stars, but rather the threads of silver, spider-webs of gold, brambles of colors, through the tears which blinded my eyes. I pulled the curtains together, undressed quickly, and got into bed anticipating the terror and delight that was approaching. As soon as I stretched out I felt a tidal wave overwhelming me, and I scarcely had time to put the light out.

ONCE more I was lying in a cave and the Indian girl was seated at my side. I had just awakened and I was aware that I had been dreaming again that I was in a strange city, riding a horseless carriage which sped along like the wind; I had talked to a fat man in a house full of strange objects, and later I had talked into a weird

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small instrument. (When I woke up in my room, I realized that this dream within my dream had reproduced exactly the events of the previous day, including my visit to Bances and my telephone call to Yolanda!) I didn't tell my dream to the Indian girl, who was changing the bandage on my wound. Inside the cave it was warm and pleasant and I felt relaxed and happy. My armor lay nearby, like a silver skeleton. She had taken off her blouse and leather skirt and was wearing only a thin garment which outlined her magnificent figure.

When she was finished with the bandaging, her brown fingers started tracing signs and figures on the ground. First she drew a high mountain and two figures which I guessed were supposed to be she and I, and indicated with gestures that we were climbing, always climbing. Then she made a rough sketch of figures, some looking like me and others like her: our enemies, soldiers and Indians. With dramatic gestures she indicated to me that on the top of the mountain we were scaling there was a passage leading to a valley. There, she gave me to understand with a sweep of her hand that erased the figures she had traced, we would find liberty. I signalled my agreement to her and made an effort to stand up, but she held me down. She pointed to the top of the mountain which stood between us and the passage leading to freedom, she drew a crown of zigzagging rays, she accompanied her sketch with shouts and grimaces, and finally went over to the fire and piled the burning wood into a mound to indicate the apex of the mountain. Then I understood: we were scaling the volcano Irazu. The passage we were going to cross was often covered by flames and lava from the volcano. If we were lucky we would escape our pursuers; otherwise our flight would end in death. And what a death! In an abyss of fire, among the flames of hell.

I pressed her hands in mine, and when she let out a moan I remembered she too had been wounded and had bandaged her own wound with some rags. Carefully I unbandaged it and saw that the palm of her hand had been pierced right through by the arrow. The wound was clean but large, and the blood was already dry. I washed it and bandaged it up again. Then we sat close to one another. Her skin was living copper, her eyes clear and serene, but age-old sadness crouched in the corner of each pupil. In a few moments our mouths met.

It was cold outside when we left the cave. Not a sound could be heard, not even the swishing of the wind. Behind us was the steep ascent jutting with trees stripped of leaves like skeletons of their flesh, with twisting branches like imploring hands. Before us rose the mountain devoid of all living matter, scorched everywhere, covered with black ash. The girl squeezed my hand and I understood: we were starting on the last decisive stage of our flight.

Panting heavily, hand in hand we climbed. Always up. Sheer desolation. Always up. The girl's hair shone in the scarlet light. Always up. Death or freedom. And then, as we passed a huge rock, the volcano appeared, spectacularly, dramatically. My heart beat fast as the dazzling scarlet splendor blinded me and the bitter dense smoke choked me. A few feet from us was the mouth of the crater, the sinister bubbling of the boiling lake, the threatening flames belching clouds of thick smoke. Fear seized me, but the girl pressed my hand and then pointed behind and in front of her. I understood. We kissed and then we went on.

AT THAT moment in my dream I woke up suddenly in my room. It was still dark. Why had my dream been interrupted? What had happened to the soldier and the Indian girl? I tried to fall asleep again. I tossed and tossed from one side to the other. But sleep did not come. I was as wide awake as if it were day. I looked at the clock. It was already five in the morning—Sunday morning.

Painfully I got out of bed and got dressed with great difficulty, although my wound did not hurt much. Suddenly I had a stroke of intuition. Why hadn't I thought of it before? If my dream referred so concretely to the life of a Spanish soldier in Costa Rica, why had it not occurred to me to search among old documents for some reference, some allusion which might provide a key to the mystery? Surely in the Indian Section of the City Archives there must be many a

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reference to the period of the *Conquistadores,* their wanderings and adventures, which might throw some light on my dream.

By eight o'clock in the morning I could wait no longer, and I went to the home of Don Eusebio Arnaez, senior archivist of the city and the most learned historian in Costa Rica.

A half-asleep Don Eusebio greeted me sullenly. How I convinced him to take me at that hour on a Sunday to the Archives I hardly know now, but I remember that I invented every possible reason, I marshalled every argument, called upon our friendship, reminded him of past favors. In vain Don Eusebio tried to argue, to refuse, to put off complying with my request. But how could he argue with a man possessed? He *had* to take me to the Archives, to open the library and show me documents and books dealing with the beginnings of the Spanish occupation of Costa Rica. After a half hour of resistance, he put on his hat and, wearing a most dour expression, went out with me and clambered into my car.

Several hours later an exhausted, perspiring and furious Don Eusebio was brandishing the key to the archives before me and threatening to go right out and call the police if I did not leave. I had leafed through hundreds of documents concerning Spanish colonization—yellowed parchments, ancient scrolls, books bound in ivory, illustrated hymnals, thick moth-eaten bundles of papers, manuscripts gnawed by rats. All this had transpired under bleak, murky electric lights, with a swarm of insects whirring around our heads and sweat falling in thick drops from my forehead on to the dusty pages recording centuries of adventure and legend.

The silence of the room was all-pervasive. We had locked the doors and pulled the blinds so no one would see us from the outside. The heat was suffocating. The dust of the manuscripts sent Don Eusebio into fits of sneezing.

With mounting annoyance he had kept handing me books and papers which I glanced through and threw aside like a maniac. Every time I opened the covers of a book I could smell the bitter aroma of history; every time I turned a page and the air moved, centuries sprang to life. Finally, overcome, soaked in perspiration, choking from the dust, I looked hopelessly at Don Eusebio who, red with heat and fury, started towards the door. But the curiosity he had built up through many years of bibliophilia and research—or perhaps he still felt some spark of friendliness for me—overcame his discomfort and indignation.

"There's only one more possibility," he said as we reached the door. "We have a box of manuscripts written by some Spanish soldiers and *encomenderos.*"

Grabbing his arm, I almost dragged him back into the room. From a bottom shelf of one of the book compartments, Don Eusebio pulled out a musty box as we heard the muffled noise of mice scurrying away. Under the light of a lamp on one of the tables, we opened the box and took out a bunch of manuscripts bound in parchment.

CAREFULLY we looked them over—reports of land-owners, wills, commissions, accounts, breviaries, all written by hand on yellow paper as brittle as pressed roses. When I finally opened one manuscript and read on the first page: "This is a personal account of Don Fernando de Mendoza, Infantry Captain in the service of His Most Illustrious Majesty Felipe III, which the said Don Fernando de Mendoza leaves to His Sovereign and to his own relatives, if some Christian be good enough to bear it to them."

The manuscript was dated 1567, and I knew I had come to the end of my search.

I embraced Don Eusebio and fervently promised to return the manuscript to him in the morning. What should logically have been the straw to break the camel's back, simply mollified my old friend completely. The human being has a limitless capacity for love and for hate, for joy and for anger. Don Eusebio's irritation had reached the saturation point and my last infraction of the rules which had ordered his life and work for twenty years was so serious that he simply could not muster up enough anger to cope with it. Besides, he had probably decided it was quite useless to argue with a madman.

"Take good care of it and be sure to bring

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it back tomorrow morning," he said weakly as I was already running towards the door.

BACK home, I did not even bother locking the door behind me, went straight to my study and sat down with the manuscript clutched in my hands. The twenty-odd pages, yellowed and moth-eaten, exuded an odor that reminded me of leaves that had soaked and decomposed in a stagnant pool. The ink was now just a pale vestige of the original color. A card typewritten by the librarian, repeated the title and date of the document and added: "This manuscript was picked up in the mountains by a Spanish soldier several weeks after the disappearance of Captain Fernando de Mendoza. The manuscript was found in one of the metal tubes used during the days of the Conquest to hold documents. It was written with a quill and ink which men of arms who were also interested in letters used to carry among their stores during the Spanish domination. The manuscript was handed over to the relatives of the vanished chronicler, and they handed it down from generation to generation; it was finally deposited with the Archives when the first municipality was organized in Costa Rica. Its authenticity is beyond question, since what it relates coincides with all the reports made by the former comrades-in-arms of said Captain Mendoza."

As I pored over the pages, my eyes first widened with stupor, and then turned bleary from the effort of deciphering the pale scribbling which danced over the pages and which seemed to fall apart like dust under my nervous fingers. Across time and space a voice was speaking directly to me in the solitude and silence of my study. That voice was repeating my dreams. It was telling me that three hundred years before there had occurred the very same adventure of flight, blood, and love that I had been living through these last nights in my dreams.

The revelation was too horrible: a wave of nausea overcame me and a cold sweat broke out all over my body. I dropped the manuscript on the table and staggered to the bathroom. There I undressed with great difficulty, got into the bathtub and turned on the hot water.

I don't know how long I remained in this semi-conscious state. Several times I tried to get up, but I couldn't. I remember turning the cold-water on. I must have spent hours in the lukewarm mixture before I felt strong enough to go back to my study.

But the most staggering shock of all was still to come, for when I reached the point where my last dream had ended, the manuscript ended too. Someone had torn out the last page!

I STARED blankly at the ragged edge that was all that was left of the last page. What had happened? Who had tampered with the manuscript? Why? Had the page been torn out three hundred years before, when the manuscript was found by the soldier? Had it been ripped out by one of the many hands through which it had passed before getting to me? I recalled that when Don Eusebio opened the box, he mentioned that many of the manuscripts had pages missing that had been torn out, or eaten up by moths and mice. But why *this* page? It struck me that it might have been torn out because the fate of Captain Mendoza had been so terrible that his descendants wanted no one to know about it. My teeth began to chatter.

Had the action been motivated by the pious desire to bury the horror of his death in mystery?

My hand was reaching for the telephone to call Don Eusebio and elicit his help when I stopped abruptly. For it suddenly dawned on me that it was better to know nothing more. Let the next—the definitive—dream come enveloped in the same mystery as the others. If I was doomed, it was better not to know it beforehand.

A couple of soft knocks on my door startled me. Before I could get up, there was Yolanda, dressed in the cherry-colored frock I loved, her eyes filled with anxiety.

I clasped her tightly as if she were the only solid, real thing I could hold on to. Then we sat down on the sofa, and overwhelmed each other with questions. Worried about me, she had returned earlier than she had planned, and too troubled to care about conventions, she had come directly to my house.

"Fernando, what is it?" she asked me.

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I NO longer had the right or the desire to keep silent or try to disguise the truth. I had to warn her that she might be marrying a madman.

"Yolanda," I said, "what I am going to tell you may frighten you so that you run away and never lay eyes on me again. But I have to tell you everything. After I finish, you can decide for yourself whether you still want to marry me—that is, if I am still alive and in possession of my reason."

As I listened to myself speak, my story sounded so outrageously absurd that I myself doubted it. Yolanda did not ask me a single question, did not move, did not even blink. Only her hands held mine tightly and her face slowly turned as pale as the keys of an old clavichord.

"This manuscript," I said, pointing to the yellowed sheets on the table, "is the story of the Captain Mendoza who, three centuries ago, actually experienced the dreams I have had the past few nights.

"Captain Mendoza, the manuscript reveals, served under Don Miguel de Ojeda, Commander of the Spanish forces that first explored Costa Rica. It seems that when they invaded a village near Cartago, they seized some rich booty which they intended to divide up among the leaders of the expedition. Captain Mendoza swore that he didn't know how it happened, but a purse full of emeralds and other precious stones which they took from the chieftain of the tribe, disappeared and was found empty in his doublet. The other leaders had him tortured to get him to confess where he had hidden the precious stones, and finally threw him into a cave, intending to kill him in the morning. That night, an Indian girl crept up to him as the others slept, cut his bonds, and pointed to the path going up a mountain. The Captain fled and the Indian girl followed him closely, providing him with fruit while he slept, covering with branches the entrance to the caves where he sought refuge, and erasing his footsteps along the path. You know the rest: Captain Mendoza simply relates what I have lived through in my dreams.

"Everything that happened to him has happened to me these last few nights. When he slept during the day, he too had strange dreams which he relates vaguely in his manuscript. He saw himself in strange clothing, living in the San Jose of today, dealing with strange people, and in love with a woman whom he describes. You are that woman, Yolanda.

"What finally happened must have been related on the last page which was torn from the manuscript. Captain Mendoza and the Indian girl loved each other and I have told you frankly about the nights he spent—that *I* spent in my dreams—with the passionate Indian girl. The story comes to an abrupt stop on this page.

"What happened later? What did the last page say? Was it written before they started on the last lap of their journey, and is it a farewell to life? Or were those lines scribbled after they found the path and crossed it safely? I don't know. I don't think I really want to know, because as soon as I shut my eyes I shall live out the climax to my dreams.

"If you think I am mad, I set you free right now. I love you, Yolanda, I want you to know that. But I want you to know also that I want to live my dream to the end. I am afraid to fall asleep, and yet I want more than anything to dream again."

Yolanda's voice was as firm as the pressure of her hand on mine.

"Fernando," she said, "I love you and believe in you. We are going to be married immediately. Get together everything you need, right now. I'll go to my house and get what I need, and we'll never be separated a moment again. We'll fight one madness with another. We'll go to the hermitage in the mountain. The priest there will marry us. You won't be afraid to fall asleep then, because you'll sleep with me in your arms."

I did not argue with her; it did not even occur to me to refuse. We did exactly what she said.

WE ARRIVED at the hermitage in the late afternoon. The little stone house on top of a hill is surrounded by underbrush and silence. Even the bells ring in the blue with muted tones.

The hermit is an old man with sky-blue eyes; his beard falls to his waist and he wears a cassock and rope. He is surprised by nothing and married us as simply as he

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says his own prayers. I slipped my family ring on Yolanda's finger as a Virgin, cut of wood, smiled down at us from the altar. The candles flickered, and the hermit's prayer followed us as we walked out of the church.

The farm house to which we went directly after the wedding belongs to a couple who have known Yolanda since childhood and love her too much to question anything she might do. With tears in their eyes, they gave us the upper floor, crowded with heavy furniture and huge mirrors. The smell of soap and lye is everywhere. Everything is solid, clean, peaceful. The silence is divine.

Alone in our room, I sat down at a table to write this story, while Yolanda talked with our hosts downstairs. Yolanda's purse was on the table and as I pushed it to a corner, it fell on to the floor and the metal clasp opened. Keys, lipstick, mirror, everything spilled over. Carefully I placed everything back. The last thing I picked up was a yellowed piece of paper folded over many times: *the last page from Mendoza's manuscript.*

As I stared dazedly at the paper in my hand, Yolanda walked in. She came over and put her hands on my shoulders. Her eyes were full of compassion.

"Fernando, my darling, I've got to explain. I ran to your house in alarm, I found the door open and went in. You were in the bathroom. In your study the manuscript caught my eye. I quickly scanned through it, but when I got to the last page I stopped. I didn't want to know the end and I didn't want you to know either. So I tore the page out and left the room. I waited outside your door and returned only when I heard you going back to your study. I intended to tell you later that I had the page and to ask you if you wanted to look at it."

"But, Yolanda, how did you know the manuscript was so important to me? How did you sense that this was happening to me?"

"I didn't sense it; I knew."

"You knew?"

"Yes. My dreams started the same night as yours. That is why I was so upset the first time you told me. Since then I have not had to question you. I knew that we were both dreaming the same thing. Your horrible nights were mine. When finally I felt so disturbed that I was afraid I couldn't hide it from you any longer, I thought up some excuse to go to Puerto Limon for a few days. But my dreams still continued there."

"Then you knew what was happening to me in those dreams?"

"Yes, for I was—I am—the Indian girl who saved you, the girl to whom you made love on the floor of the cave. That is why I read the manuscript when I realized what it was. That is why I wanted us to get married before the climax comes. Your fate is mine."

Taking the glove off her right hand—the glove she had worn all afternoon and which, in my half-dazed condition I had not even noticed—she showed me a wide pink scar. It was the wound she had received from an arrow the very same day I was wounded in the shoulder.

"I, too," Yolanda whispered, "got up one day with this wound."

I clasped her in my arms. Way down deep I felt she already knew the outcome, that she had read the last page of the manuscript, but I said nothing.

"Fernando, go on with your writing," she said.

As I write these lines, Yolanda is sitting next to me. Outside the night has descended from the mountains upon the valley. The moon—the same moon that witnessed our flight and love centuries ago—is a silver disk over the peaceful land. As soon as I finish these lines we shall put out the candle and we shall lie down on the wide peasant bed with its starched white sheets that smell of soap and apples. We shall fall asleep and together go through the last stage of our flight. And whatever happens, we are just as certain that we shall continue loving each other, as we are that the moon will shine forever and the goodness of God flow eternally over us.

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No Goddess of Destruction was going to keep him from the fabulous necklace a certain lady had demanded.

BY GARNETT RADCLIFFE

Heading by Jon Arfstrom

The Vengeance of Kali Mai

BONDA, the Kashmiri nautch girl, liked to tease as much as she liked to dance. Above all she liked teasing Kenneth Shand. He was an Anglo-Indian, a hard, tough man accustomed to getting what he wanted. He wanted Bonda, but Bonda, who had had the adulation of princes, thought Shand very small fry finan-

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cially and always evaded him like she would a snake.

"You are big strong man, but I am Bonda," she told him in her sing-song voice. "Bonda ees not cheap bazaar missy. Bonda has a price. Last year a Rajah offered Bonda her weight in diamonds, but Bonda said, " 'No, thank you. You are old and ugly and Bonda is the most beautiful nautch girl in India. You can keep your diamonds.' "

Her eyes tantalized him. Shand moistened his lips and spoke.

"Am *I* old and ugly?"

"No, you are quite 'andsome, Mistaire Shand. But I tell you Bonda has a price. For you the price ees—what shall I make the price? A lac of pink pearls?"

"Don't fool me, Bonda. I'm no millionaire."

"No, you are just a man who makes business in Calcutta. It ees big cheek for you to want Bonda. Still, you are quaite 'andsome, so I say another price. You bring me ze Bo necklace! How is that, Mistaire Shand? You tink Bonda ees worth ze Bo necklace?"

"What the hell is the Bo necklace?"

She laughed up at him from her cushions. Her skin was gold, her mouth scarlet, her eyes deep pools of unholy enchantment. She wore a red flower behind each ear.

"You find out an' then you bring it to me. Now you must go, Mistaire Shand. Bonda 'as told you her price an' the rest ees for you to do."

She pressed the bell that would summon a servant. Shand rose with a growl between a laugh and a curse. He had no illusions about Bonda. All she wanted from men was what they could give her in the way of jewels.

"Au revoir, Bonda," he grinned. "When I've found the Bo necklace I'll give you a ring . . . In the meantime there are other girls."

HE WASN'T to rid himself of Bonda as easily as that. It was because of what she had said that he found himself some four months later walking along a jungle path too narrow to admit his car.

Probably tigers had made that path. The air was fetid, the branches of sissoo trees met overhead and the spear grass grew higher than a man. Shand was indifferent to the heat and the clouds of insects. Burly and powerful he strode on, conscious of the reassuring weight of the revolver he carried on his hip.

As he walked he thought of the nautch girl and he smiled. It would be a shock for the little devil if he turned up with the Bo necklace after all! She'd imagined he was putting an impossible price on herself, but she'd been wrong.

Luck had put him on the trail of the Bo necklace. By the sheerest chance he had met in the rest-bungalow at Chota Miran a little birch-like missionary called Dr. Erskine who was an antiquarian and an authority on Indian mythology.

Also, he was a bore—at least he was to a man like Shand. What did Shand care about the Vedic paradise, Gautama and the Temple of Buddh Gaya? He'd almost fallen asleep listening to the missionary's dry monologue. But then he'd heard Erskine mention the Goddess Kali Mai and the necklace from the Bo Tree supposed to have been given her by Siva, and he'd sat up as if he had heard a shot.

"The Bo necklace! Is there actually such a thing?" His surprise had made the missionary smile.

"Of course there is. As a matter of fact I am one of the few white men who have seen it. It is composed of enormous rubies which the lenged says are washed in human blood to preserve the sheen. The clasp is a gold and diamond figure of Kali Mai . . . It's all very crude and blatant, but . . ."

He went droning on, making comparisons between Hindu and Chinese workmanship. At last Shand had managed to get in his question. He'd tried to make his voice sound off-hand.

"I suppose the priests have it locked up somewhere?"

Dr. Erskine had adjusted his spectacles and smiled as if at the ingenuousness of a child.

"Dear me, no! They trust Kali Mai to guard her own property. When I saw it it was hanging round the neck of a life-size bronze image of the Black Mother in a little temple near Baruti. I could have stolen it with the greatest ease if I'd wished to.

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The temple is tucked right away in the jungle and there hasn't been another soul within sight except an old priest snoring in an archway."

"Weren't you tempted?" Shand had grinned.

"Not in the least. Even if I had been I'd have been too afraid of Kali Mai to attempt any nonsense. She's a very jealous lady, you know. No, call me superstitious if you like, but I've been long enough in India to learn to respect Hindu deities!"

"I guess you're right," Shand had said.

Inwardly he had been grinning. *He'd* no fear of Kali Mai. The Bo necklace would look nicer round Bonda's slim neck than round that of a rusty old bronze idol with four arms and a lolling tongue!

THREE days after that talk with Dr. Erskine he had driven to Baruti, only thirty koss from Chota Miran. It was a sleepy, jungly country untouched by civilization. The natives seemed indifferent to everything except chewing *pan* and opium. They stared at the white man like doped bullocks.

Shand told himself that if he stole a hundred necklaces nobody would ever know nor care.

At last a turn in the path brought him within sight of his objective. The temple of the Goddess of Destruction was a squat little red affair with four golden minarets. In the shimmering silence of the jungle it looked like a crude toy dropped there by a child.

As he gazed he saw small brown forms creep shadow-like from the entrance and heard their anxious chatter. He grinned. So the temple had become a playground for monkeys! That indicated to him how often the locals had worshipped their Goddess!

A moment later he was inside the temple. It was pleasantly cool and dark after the jungle. Snakes, he warned himself. This is the sort of place one might expect to find them.

He looked around cautiously. He could see no sign of snakes, but the raucous cry of a bird like the sudden laugh of an idiot made him start. He swore aloud, then he took a grip of himself. There was nothing, he told himself, to be scared of in this dank ruin of a temple.

THE image of Kali Mai stood on a sort of altar at the farther end. It was more than life-size, fashioned out of bronze black with time. Her knees were bent, her feet turned outwards and her four arms raised in what seemed a threatening attitude. The Goddess had been depicted in her most malignant aspect. Her face was contorted in a scowl, her tongue, which was painted red, lolled from her mouth.

Shand gasped. He had seen what he had hardly hoped to see. The price of Bonda was coiled like a red snake round the thick bronze throat. Even in that dim place the rubies glowed like huge drops of blood. Yes, the Bo necklace was superb, a treasure for which Bonda would have bartered her little soul.

He moved closer to the image that he might see better. Then a rustling sound made him whip around. A shaven, half-naked figure with a knife in its hand was darting at him, its bare feet falling like leaves on the marble floor.

Another second and the knife would have been in his back. As he dodged he saw mad eyes and a rage-distorted mouth. Somehow the priest had guessed his intent. He had intended to kill the profaner of the temple.

Shand's blow sent him staggering. He turned like a wild-cat and leapt again. This time his lunge brought the knife within an inch of Shand's throat.

Panic gripped Shand. There could be no reasoning with this crazed skeleton. It was his life or the priest's. As the priest leapt again he drew his revolver and fired point-blank.

Silence followed the shot. Shand stared down at something that twitched and jerked like a maimed insect on the tessellated floor. There were drops of blood more vivid than a ruby. 'The price of Bonda?' Shand thought.

At last the priest lay still, a heap of rags with limbs like brown sticks. Shand drew a deep breath. He hadn't reckoned on having to kill a man.

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Could he conceal the body? He looked around and saw a ring set in the floor that seemed to indicate a trap-door. He grasped it with both hands, braced himself and heaved.

After a moment the slab in which the ring was set rose stiffly to disclose a pit of darkness.

His next task was unpleasant. With set teeth and averted head he raised the body of the priest and dragged it to the pit. A trailing hand seemed to claw the marble as if reluctant to leave the temple. Again the unseen bird uttered its raucous laugh. Shand started at the sound. With a quick, guilty movement he pushed the body into the pit. The darkness swallowed it and after what seemed a long time he heard a splash of water.

He felt better when he had closed the trap-door. In that lethargic, opium-sodden district it was a thousand to one against anyone ever discovering his crime. Kali Mai had been the only witness. He had no fear of Kali Mai.

He mopped his face and addressed the image.

"You won't split, will you, old girl? Now don't go sticking out your tongue at me! I want your necklace for someone much prettier than you are."

THE image scowled in the half-light. Quickly he sprang up the three wide steps leading to the altar. There were little charred bones scattered around on those steps; relics of sacrifices that had been offered to the Goddess.

She was taller than he was. To reach the clasp of the Bo necklace he had to stand on one of her bronze feet and lean against her hard bronze body. As he did so the horrific face with its leering tongue was close to his.

His fingers fumbled with the clasp. As he did so the foot on which he was standing seemed to move. He heard a dull metallic clang followed by a creaking, rumbling sound as if some heavy machinery had suddenly been set in motion.

He sprang like an animal aware of a trap. He was too late. The four arms of Kali Mai had curled inwards like the legs of a centipede. They had caught him and were crushing him to her breast in a horrible embrace.

He yelled. In another instant he would be crushed to a pulp by those inexorable bronze arms. As he felt the pressure increase he grasped her throat and exerted all his strength in a last mad struggle for life.

Tighter and tighter grew the arms. They closed quite slowly. The ancient priests who had devised that trap had intended a lingering death for any thief who dared to rob the Black Mother of Destruction.

Lolling tongue and cold staring eyes! Shand screamed again and beat at the face with bleeding fists. Her arms like iron bands were hugging him to death. *Tighter—tighter.*

He couldn't breathe and the blood was roaring in his head.

Then he became aware that the image was swaying on its base. It was tilting forward as if her victim was too heavy for Kali Mai. Suddenly, there was the snap of something breaking. He was aware of a falling sensation followed by a crash.

A spell of blackness followed. Then he awoke to realize he was free. The image of Kali Mai lay beside him on the marble floor. Some age-weakened spring had broken and he could drag himself from her arms.

He stood swaying above the prostrate Goddess. It hurt to breathe and his hands were bruised and bleeding. But he'd escaped!

A miracle had delivered him from the clutches of Kali Mai!

She looked horrible and malignant lying at his feet. He grinned as he bent over her and took the necklace from her throat. He'd beaten her—he'd escaped the vengeance of Kali Mai! And now for Bonda and his reward. . . .

EVEN Bonda was impressed by the Bo necklace. She stroked the great stones with sensuous delight. They glowed on her golden throat, as they had never glowed on Kali Mai.

"You, are brave and clevoire as well as 'andsome, Mistaire Shand. I ask you to do what I think impossible and you 'ave done

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it! Yes, I love you. . . . For every stone in ze necklace I kiss you—so and so. . . . I will show you 'ow I love you!"

That temple at Baruti seemed very far away. With the nautch girl in his arms he sank at last into a deep sleep. The room was cool and heavy with a scent of jasmine.

Late next morning he woke with a start. He had had a most frightful nightmare. It had left his heart pounding and his body wet.

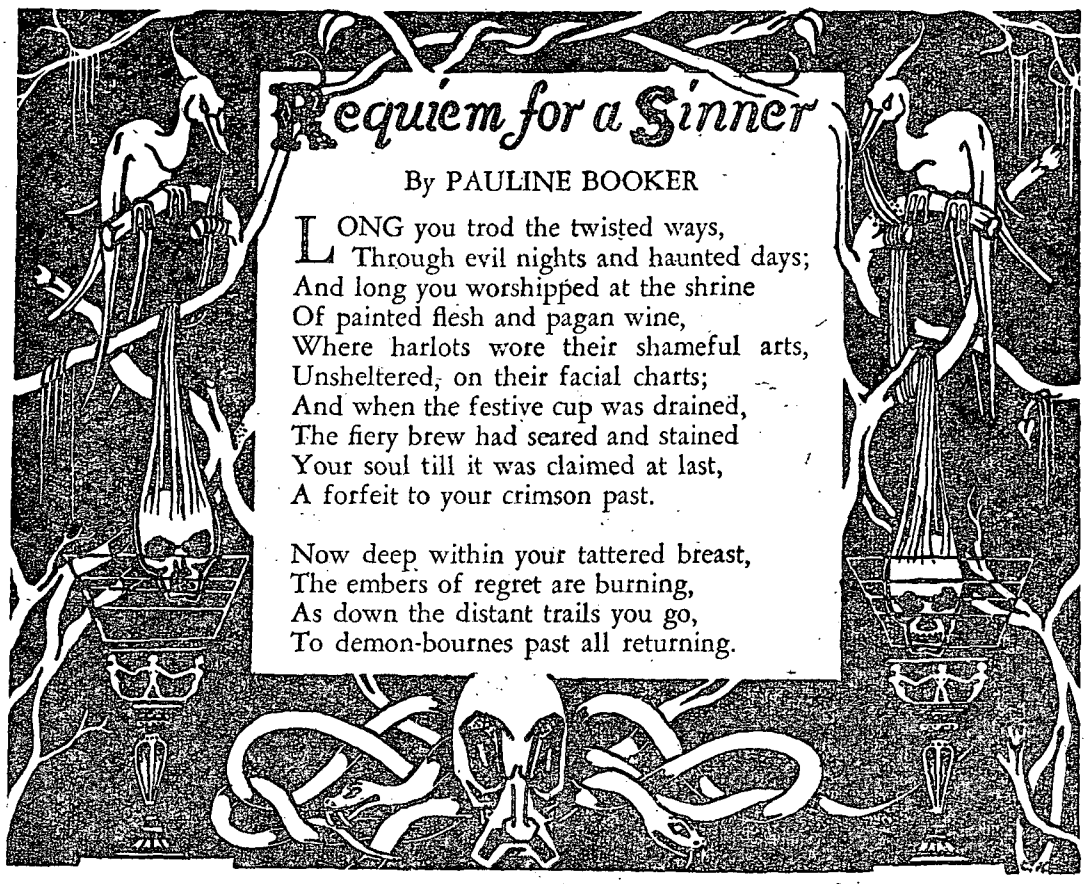
What a dream! He had seemed to be again in that silent temple wrestling with Kali Mai. He'd felt her arms embracing him, he'd seen her staring eyes and lolling tongue, and he'd felt his hands closing around her throat . . .

Yes, it had been a horribly vivid nightmare. What a wonderful relief to be awake and know himself safely in Calcutta with Bonda at his side. Bonda? He put out his arm to draw her closer to him.

She felt strangely limp and still. And she was huddled in a strange position. He lifted himself in the disordered bed. As he did so he realized his hands felt stiff and strained.

"Bonda?" he called sharply. *"Bonda?"*

The sun fell through the curtain for him to see her face. As her head rolled towards him he saw with a shock of horror beyond horror that his dream had not been a dream after all. It was as if Kali Mai herself were grinning up at him from the silken pillow!



Requiem for a Sinner

By PAULINE BOOKER

LONG you trod the twisted ways,
Through evil nights and haunted days;
And long you worshipped at the shrine
Of painted flesh and pagan wine,
Where harlots wore their shameful arts,
Unsheltered, on their facial charts;
And when the festive cup was drained,
The fiery brew had seared and stained
Your soul till it was claimed at last,
A forfeit to your crimson past.

Now deep within your tattered breast,
The embers of regret are burning,
As down the distant trails you go,
To demon-bournes past all returning.

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". . . a seed of some dead person put to death for murder."

Heading by Virgil Finlay

Mandrake

BY ADAM HULL SHIRK

"FALLON, you've got to help me!" Dr. George Burton laid one hand, which trembled, upon the arm of his friend, the eminent psychologist, Professor Fallon, and fixed his tired eyes upon the latter's calm face.

"Of course I'll help you, George," said the scientist, reassuringly, "but first you must tell me just what is the matter."

Dr. Burton sat back in his chair and nodded slowly:

"Yes," he said, "I will. But—I don't understand it all myself."

"Never mind—go ahead—"

"You remember my writing you last Fall that I hoped to be married before so very long? Well, that hope may never be realized. This is the story: A couple years ago, Power

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Marbury and his wife and two daughters came to Cranways. Six months later, Mrs. Marbury died. You may recall the case. The husband was convicted. It was murder, and though the evidence was purely circumstantial, there was never a doubt of the outcome. Power Marbury was sentenced to pay the extreme penalty and did so, unconfessed."

The physician rose and took a turn across the room before reseating himself. The psychologist said nothing. Presently the younger man continued:

"Can you imagine the effect on those two girls—Alice, not yet sixteen and Marjorie just two years her senior? Is it any wonder that they were stricken, almost driven insane? It was fortunate they had one friend in this narrow, hellfearing community. Old Squire Broadman had been their father's executor, to care for the considerable property left to the girls, but remaining in his hands until they should marry when it reverted to them automatically. He it was who defied the pious citizens and took them in, to share his bachelor home, like daughters of his own. Had it not been for him, Fallon, God knows what would have become of those two helpless orphans."

"What followed?"

"Fate seemed to be relentless," pursued the doctor, "and after a while Alice fell ill. I was called in. But in spite of all I could do, she faded, just as a flower transplanted to alien soil will wither and die. I exerted all my slight skill. The malady was apparently impervious to drugs. And in the end she —died . . . That left Marjorie—alone.

"In the days when I had attended her sister, I learned to love her. I have never met a girl who was blessed with a sweeter disposition and how she bore up under it all, no one will ever understand. I had not spoken to her, of course, but some day I knew that I should do so, and that she would receive my proposal favorably I had good cause to believe . . . This brings me up to recent events—events that have resulted in my sending for you, Fallon."

"You are welcome to my help—but you have not yet told me what the present difficulty is."

The physician sighed:

"I'm coming to that," he muttered. "It was about three weeks ago that I learned Marjorie had taken to visiting the cemetery where her mother and father and sister were buried. It lies just outside the village. I remonstrated with her, because I saw it was a means of keeping the tragedies ever before her mind. But it was of no avail. Then, about ten days ago, she was stricken—"

"Stricken?" The scientist looked sharply at his friend. "What happened?"

"She was found on her doorstep in a dead faint, a look of absolute horror frozen on her face. I was called, and it took me several hours to revive her. When she came to, she confessed to having been frightened, but that was all she could or would tell. Then I learned she had been to see a charlatan who has lately come to town and established himself in offices here—Valdemar is his name, and he claims to be a hypnotist, psychometrist, or something of the kind."

"I know the breed," nodded Fallon. "Go on. She saw him?"

"Yes. I deduced that this might be the cause of her collapse and visited him myself. He admitted her consulting him, that she seemed obsessed regarding her father's possible innocence and had asked his advice. He said he had been unable to help her. Indeed, he seemed so fair spoken that I could find no cause to blame him. But Marjorie grew worse. She has become morose and seems to have lost confidence not only in me, but even in her guardian, who is as deeply anxious as I am.

"Fallon, she is secretly worried or frightened, and it is driving her slowly mad. That's why I've sent for you. Can you help me—by helping her?"

The savant sat for a moment immersed in thought. Finally he nodded.

"I feel certain I can," he declared, "and I suggest that we call on the young lady at once. Can it be arranged?"

"Certainly—I was about to suggest it—"

"Introduce me as a brother physician visiting you—nothing more and—"

Fallon's speech was interrupted by a knock at the office door, and in a moment the attendant announced that Peleg White wanted to see the doctor urgently.

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Burton turned to his friend apologetically. "He's a sort of half-wit I've befriended—it won't take a moment."

"Bring him in," suggested Fallon.

The old creature came haltingly into the room, a malformed, hesitating parody of mankind. His story was quickly told, however, and, strangely enough, bore upon their present problem.

"It's about Miss Marjorie, Doctor," he said, "I know she's a friend of yours. Well, last night I slept out in the old hollow-tree near the buryin' ground, and I seen her come stealin' in like a ghost. I wasn't afeared, though, an' I followed to where her father was buried. She kneeled right down by his grave, and I thought she was prayin'—"

"What was she doing—?"

"She was pullin' something up outen the ground—looked like a weed or somethin'. And just as it came 'way, they was the most awful onearthly shriek I ever heard in all my born days. Miss Marjorie she yelled out, too, and started to runnin' away. I run, myself. And then I knew you'd oughter know."

"Thank you, Peleg," said the doctor with a look of dismay on his face as he glanced at Fallon. "Here's a dollar for you. Don't say anything about this to a soul."

Mouthing his thanks, the half-wit hastened away. Burton then turned to his friend.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"It means," said the psychologist, "that the sooner we see Miss Marjorie, the better. Come along."

THEY found the girl alone, pale, indicating by her manner lack of sleep and a condition of extreme nervousness.

To their questions as to her feelings, she answered listlessly. The psychologist said little, but observed her every move and gesture.

Back at Burton's office, the later asked:

"Have you formed any conclusion?"

The other shook his head negatively.

"Not as yet. But I can assure you one thing. There is a cause for her malady that is not altogether pathological. It goes deeper, my boy—we've got to locate it."

On the following day, while the two men were seated again in the doctor's consulting room, Peleg White put in his appearance in a state of extreme agitation. Admitted to the office, he plumped down on the table a grotesque object that resembled nothing the physician could remember having seen in his experience.

"I just come from Miss Marjorie," panted the half-wit. "She wanted I should sell this durn thing for forty cents or less. Said I mustn't take as much even as half a dollar cause she'd paid that for it. Told me not to tell anybody she give it to me, but I reckon I kin tell you. Anyway, who'd give me even a penny for the thing?"

"I will," said Fallon, before his friend could speak. "Here's exactly forty cents. Take the money right back to the lady and don't tell her who bought it. Here's a quarter for yourself."

When the creature had departed, Burton turned to his friend with the pain he felt written plainly on his face.

"In God's name," he cried, "what is it?"

FALLON took up the thing and examined it with deep interest. It was a vegetable of some sort, of a sickly flesh color so far as the root was concerned; black mould still clung to it, and when viewed from a certain angle, the root portion bore a most uncanny resemblance to a human body.

"This," said the psychologist, slowly, "is a mandrake. One of the first I have ever seen!"

"Mandrake?" Burton repeated in a puzzled tone.

"Exactly. The one plant concerning which superstition is almost universal. Many books have been written about it. Even Shakespeare refers to it—I think in 'Romeo and Juliet,' where he speaks of 'Shrieks like Mandrakes torn out of the earth'."

The doctor shook his head, shudderingly.

"I can't understand—"

"This much," said the scientist, quickly, "I do understand—we must get back to Miss Marbury at once."

Dr. Burton stared at him in sudden alarm.

"You mean she is worse?"

"I don't think so—but something must be done immediately. I suppose," he added,

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"you trace the connection between my quotation from Shakespeare and the story of Peleg about Marjorie at the cemetery?"

"You mean the shriek—that she was pulling this thing from the earth—?"

"It seems likely. But let us be going."

They found Marjorie so greatly improved on their arrival that Dr. Burton, at least, was overjoyed. His friend, however, seemed less impressed by her greater vivacity and the improved color in her cheeks. Seeking an excuse for their return so soon after the previous visit—though the doctor himself was in the habit of calling almost every day—Fallon observed that he had wanted to look at some of the Squire's books which he had noted when they were there before.

"I'm sorry," said the girl. "the Squire is out. But you can make yourself at home there, anyway—in the library."

Fallon smiled at her as he expressed his thanks.

Dr. Burton followed him to the door.

"She's better, don't you think?"

"She's seen Peleg," murmured Fallon enigmatically, and left them together.

IN THE library, quite an extensive one, he browsed among the books, looked at several, rubbed some of the upper edges gingerly with his forefinger and read a few lines from certain volumes. He also examined the contents of a Japanese card tray on a table, slipped one card into his pocket, and made a note on a slip of paper.

When he returned, Marjorie was smiling happily, but, as he gazed into her face, he noted the sudden alteration in her expression. She was staring with increasing horror, past him at the doorway. Dr. Burton noticed the change at the same instant, and rose with a question on his lips. But Professor Fallon, seizing a stick from the corner of the room, slashed viciously at a small pinkish object that was crawling along the floor and through the draperies at the entrance.

The scientist followed, leaving Burton to care for the girl, who had sunk back on the couch, one hand at her heart:

"He lied to me," she whispered, "he lied—"

Then she fainted. As the physician set to work to revive her, sounds of a struggle from the hallway came to his ears and his friend's voice calling his name. He laid the girl gently on the couch and tugged madly at the bell rope. As he tore the curtains aside and rushed out a servant came screaming down the corridor—

"They're killing one another," she cried.

"Go to Miss Marbury," he ordered, and hastened to where Fallon was struggling in the grasp of someone who, in the dim light he could not at first recognize; then he caught a glimpse of the white hair and beard of Squire Broadman, just as the scientist cried out:

"Hurry, for God's sake! Can't you see he's crazy?"

Together they overpowered the maniac and bound him with a cord from the portieres.

"He was in a niche of the wall," explained the psychologist, as he regained his breath. "He jumped on me as I came out."

"What does it mean?" asked Burton.

"First 'phone for an ambulance to take him away. Then get an order for the arrest of that fellow Valdemar. After that I'll explain. How is Miss Marbury?"

"Fainted—but she will be all right. Wait for me—I'll use the 'phone down stairs."

A few moments later he returned.

"That's attended to. The ambulance is coming, and they'll get Valdemar—it seems they've got enough to hold him on, anyway—obtaining money under false pretenses or something."

Marjorie had fallen into a sleep under the ministrations of the psychologist, and Burton drew his friend into the library.

"For heaven's sake," he begged, "tell me what it means."

THE other removed from his pocket another of those ill-favored vegetables and laid it on the table. "There," he said, "is the root of the whole matter. You see tied about it a bit of silk thread? I broke it with my cane. The other end was in the hands of the madman. Briefly it is part of a diabolical plot to drive Miss Marbury insane or to the grave. It's God's justice that the one responsible suffered the fate he intended to inflict on another."

"Squire Broadman?"

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"Of course. He would have lost control of the estate when Marjorie married, would he not?"

"Yes."

"That's it. Probably he has speculated with the money he held in trust. Now as to the Mandrake—and Valdemar. The cemetery story and the business of selling the plant were my first rays of light. In the library here I found, among other books, Thomas Newton's 'Herball to the Bible.' It had been much used—lately. No dust on it, such as the other books showed. This passage was marked:

" 'It is supposed to be a creature having life engendered under the earth of the seed of some dead person put to death for murder.'

"In a more recent work, Skinner's 'Myths and Legends of Flowers' I discovered a dog-eared page on which I read this: 'The devil had a special watch on these objects and unless one succeeded in selling one for less than he gave for it, it would stay with him till his death.' How does that strike you?

"But now we come to Valdemar. Here is a card I found in the Squire's card tray there. It's the charlatan's, you see. On the reverse is a memo in the Squire's writing—'See V. tomorrow and get more mandrakes.' You see, he was a benevolent old fiend. Of course, it was he who shrieked in the cemetery as she tore up the mandrake. It's hellish—that's all. Now let's see Valdemar."

THEY found the eminent psychometrist in the city jail, much perturbed and decidedly crestfallen. He told them, under methods not far removed from the third degree, his part in the transaction: Broadman had been working on the girl's mind, telling her she ought to vindicate her father's memory if she could, and sent her to Valdemar, whom he had previously hired to help in the nefarious scheme. He told her to go home and if anything happened to tell him.

As she reached the door, a white figure rose in the dark hallway—as prearranged—and commanded her in sepulchral tones neither to rest nor sleep till her father's memory had been cleared. She swooned.

Then she told the Squire, but he cautioned her not to speak to the doctor about it and again to consult Valdemar. Broadman had read the mandrake stuff and the charlatan had arranged to secure some of the plants—goodness knows where—and suggested to Marjorie that she plant one on the grave of her father. Later, if she pulled it up, and the thing shrieked, she would know her parent had been justly punished. It had merely to be planted one day and torn up the next, they told her, to attain the desired results.

She had paid fifty cents for the thing, it seems, and naturally threw it from her when she heard the awful cry. Returning home, she found what she believed to be the same mandrake somewhere about her room, for as Skinner's book had further said: "Throw it into the fire, into the river . . . so soon as you reached home, there would be the mandrake, creeping over the floor, smirking human fashion from a shelf or ensconced in your bed!"

She told Valdemar, and he assured her that if she sold the thing for less than she had paid for it, the curse would be removed. She tried this, but again one of the dread plants crept across the floor. Then the end had come swiftly. Doubtless, Valdemar admitted, the Squire was himself half demented for years. Burton, putting two and two together, believed that in some subtle way Broadman had brought about the death of Alice, as he had hoped to encompass that of Marjorie, or at least to drive her insane, so that she might not marry and thus automatically expose his own guilt in the matter of the money.

"Which proves," remarked Fallon, as he bade his friend good-bye at the station the following day, "that it pays to read abstruse matter sometimes. I knew the legend of the mandrake long before I refreshed my memory of the thing in Squire Broadman's library!"

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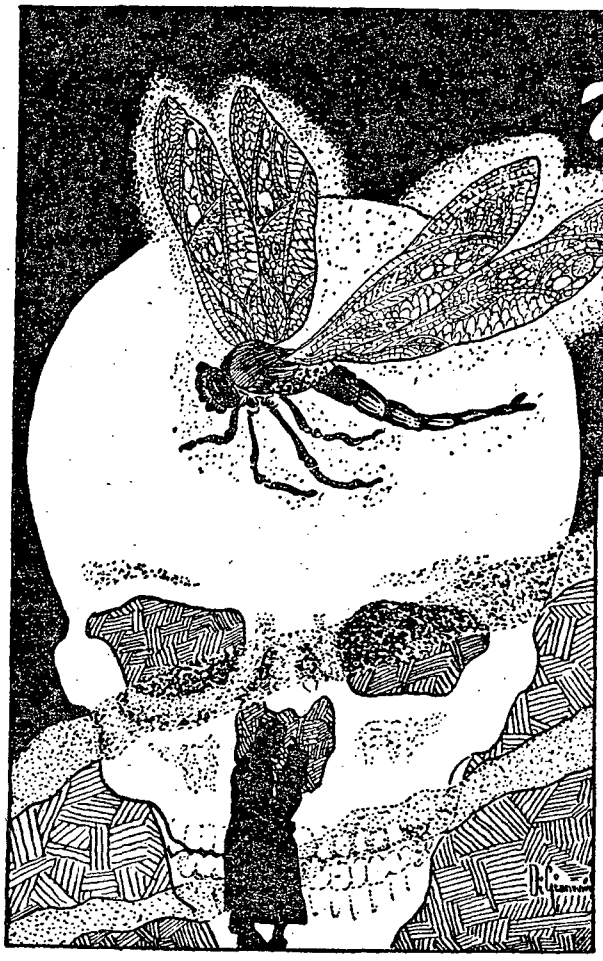

Wife of The Dragon-Fly

by Paul Ernst

His will power over insects, he used to spy on his wife. . . .

Heading by Anthony Di Giannurio

AT THE sound of his wife's voice, Medill Corey turned back on the stairs. He turned reluctantly, angry that she had seen him going up to his workroom. He had hoped to get there unobserved.

"You're not going to work again today, are you?" Beatrice Corey repeated, as Medill reached the bottom step and stood staring at her.

She looked almost ill. Her face was paler, thinner than ever. Her eyes were without luster in their wan hollows.

"Yes," said Medill, "I'm going up and work."

His pale cold eyes played over her face, feasting on the signs of her distress. His thin lips twisted and turned a little with icy pleasure.

He had her guessing, all right. And the mystery of it was killing her by inches. Good! It served her right for daring to be attracted by another man.

"You know Doctor Voight said you should have a complete rest," Beatrice Corey murmured. "You mustn't concentrate so hard on these experiments—whatever they are."

"Don't you wish you knew what they were?" Medill mocked.

Beatrice cowered back rrom him. But with pity in her eyes she stared at the thin, brittle-looking man of forty she had married six years ago.

Medill's teeth showed behind his thin lips in a positive snarl. This frequent pity of hers—this mute statement of her eyes that he was a poor deluded creature who only hurt himself with his cold jealous rages—spurred him intolerably. He lashed out in an effort to hurt her even more.

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"No, Doctor Voight," he quoted slowly and deliberately, "'I married Medill in good faith. I'll carry on with him, no matter how hard it is.'"

"Medill!"

It was barely more than a whisper that left Beatrice's lips—a whisper of horror, of almost superstitious dread.

"You didn't know I'd heard you with your precious doctor in the summer house yesterday, did you?" said Medill.

"If you heard us," replied Beatrice, "you know you have nothing to be jealous of."

"No? You're in love with Doctor Voight, my precious wife! You may be faithful to me physically, but mentally and spiritually you belong to the worthy doctor. Isn't that something to be jealous of?"

His wife ignored his words, and his tone. One large, fearful wonder took all her mind.

"How in God's name could you have heard us in the summer house?"

Medill laughed. The laugh was more chilling than an angry tirade would have been. His thin, dry hand tightened on the newel-post.

"Quite a problem, isn't it?" he said. "The summer house is set by itself in plain lawn. There is no shelter for an eavesdropper for fifty feet in all directions. Not even any trees around. And you and my fine doctor were whispering. Yet I heard every word. 'But you don't love Medill,' he had the insolence to say to you. 'You've gone through six years of hell with him. Leave him, and come to me.'"

"Have you some sort of telephone arrangement concealed in the summer house?" said Beatrice. She was a little more calm. But deep in her eyes remained the formless dread, the well-nigh superstitious terror, that had haunted them lately whenever they rested on her husband's bony face.

"No, my love," taunted Medill. "There is no dictaphone hidden there, or anything of that sort. But don't let me detain you. You are to meet the doctor at the gate in half an hour. I'll get to my work and leave you two alone in sweet privacy."

"Medill!" Beatrice caught his hand. "Whatever else you may believe—you must believe this: I mean to stick out this marriage contract as I took oath to do, and part of that is to care for your health. Doctor Voight has said you were headed for a nervous breakdown if you didn't stop your mysterious, secret experimenting. Please, please don't go to your workroom—"

Medill roughly jerked his hand away.

"A lot you'd care if I dropped dead this minute!" he snarled. "Hypocrite! Go and meet your doctor at the gate. But remember this—wherever you are and no matter how low you pitch your voices, I can hear and see everything."

He went back up the stairs; and Beatrice, after a pause, turned and walked toward the front door. Her fine face was stiff with fatigue and a nameless fear. Her unsteady gait was that of an old woman, though she was barely thirty.

At the top of the stairs, Medill peered back. He nodded grimly as he saw his wife going out onto the porch. Moving quickly on his long thin legs, he fairly scuttled to the back of the house where he had had a small bedroom padded for silence, equipped with an extra stout door, and made into a library-workroom.

ONCE inside this, he closed the heavy door and locked it. There were two big locks. He fastened them both with anxious caution; his wife feared and loathed all insects: he dared not risk her entering this room for this reason, as well as for others equally important.

In the room was a big table, a comfortable armchair, and, lining the walls, many bookcases. A smaller case was set by the table filled with books that were all little known, all on speculative aspects of psychology and physiology. One book was out of the cases and lying on the table. This was titled "Will to Power over the Involuntary Muscles." The author was Medill Corey.

But when Medill had seated himself before the table, his pale eyes glittering almost feverishly, he opened none of the books. Instead he unlocked the table drawer and took out a small box, with air-holes in it, which he handled with great care. His breath sounded audibly in the quiet room as he opened the box. If its occupant had been harmed in any way, or had bruised

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its wings, an irritating delay would be caused while he caught something else to take its place.

However, the thing in the box was all right in spite of its confinement. It flew out like a flash of light—a big dragon-fly, darting here and there in the room, hovering but to dart again, like a flying darning-needle on almost invisible wings.

A sigh of relief hissed from Medill's lips. He took his watch from his pocket and propped it on the table in front of him. Doctor Voight was to come at three o'clock. For weeks, since Medill's slowly failing health had first brought the doctor here—to meet and fall deeply in love with Beatrice—he had come at three in the afternoon, punctually. There was no reason to suppose he would be late or early today. So, at three, Medill wanted to be at the gate of his country estate to witness the meeting between them.

Medill waited till a quarter of three. He had learned from past experience that it took roughly ten minutes to make a transition. If he left this room at five minutes of three it would be about right.

He prepared for the change with an involuntary shudder. No one knew better than he himself the peril he faced. A few minutes delay in re-entering the mortal shell he had learned to leave, would be fatal. Irreparable coagulation of the stilled blood-stream would set in . . .

Tensely staring at the dragon-fly, which was at the moment beating its wings against the window-pane, Medill allowed himself to settle into the coma of concentration that accompanied his eery experiments. Like a stone image he sat before the table, eyes glazed and vacant, all his power of mind and will centered on his chest—the left side of his chest, for he was willing his heart to stop.

Beat, beat, beat, beat.

His pulse was rapid, as it always was at first. The tensity of effort required, the enormity of the thing he was about to do, always set his heart to racing a hundred to the minute—at first. That pace would change gradually till it reached an incredibly slow count—until finally there was no count at all.

Beat, beat, beat.

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Slower, and again slower.

When your heart stops, you die. All science tells you that. And the first time Medill had succeeded in the experiment of stopping his own heart he would have died, too—only, by the grace of heaven, there had chanced to be a beetle in the room—an ordinary blundering June bug that had bumbled into the place before the screens had been put up for full summer. That had saved his life, or, rather, his living intelligence. And it had also shown him, by pure accident, the transitionary power that could—must, indeed—accompany his achievement of temporary death. The living intelligence, spark of life, soul stuff, whatever you want to call it, must have a house of flesh or it perished.

Beat, beat.

Very slow, now. Thirty or so to the minute. But in the final stages it would be much slower yet. So slow, so very slow, just before the end, that thousands could be counted between beats. Medill had given a lot of thought to that. He had decided that in addition to the actual slowing of the heart, time itself must race faster for small forms of life than for humans. It would have to; otherwise insects could not live out their full span in a few hours.

Beat . . .

A KNIFE could have been jabbed into Medill's flesh without his feeling it. His eyes remained wide open, unblinking. He was absolutely still. Even the throbbing of his pulse at wrist and throat could no longer be seen.

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Beat . . .

The dragon-fly left the window-pane as though at last convinced it could not fly through the glass. It flew toward the table. But it flew reluctantly, now and then darting away from the stone-like figure of the man as if jerking against the pull of an invisible thread.

Finally, after many hoverings in midair, the iridescent thing lit on the table. To be exact, it lit on the book, "Will to Power over tht Involuntary Muscles." Then, in a steady short flight, it dated to the paling mask that was Medill's face. It hovered over the sagging head, and at length settled down on the finely wrinkled skin over the right temple.

Beat . . .

That was the last. Medill's heart was definitely stilled. No pulse, no respiration, no movement. He was dead—a pallid, slowly chilling corpse seated bolt upright in the chair before the work table.

On wings so swiftly moving that they could scarcely be seen, the dragon-fly flashed from the forehead of the corpse to the door. Under this there was a crack about half an inch high; and down the hall there was a partly opened window, with a hole in its screen.

With its thousands of eyes giving a peculiar luster and depth to every object they perceived, it lit on the floor near the threshold and wobbled on ungainly legs to the crack under the door. The edge of the rug was a four-foot wall. The dragon-fly clambered clumsily down it. Winged things are very helpless on their feet. But this creature was less awkward, at that, than the grasshopper that had left this room yesterday.

Once under the door and out in the hall, the dragon-fly flashed like a streak of light to the window and out the hole in the screen. Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! With infinite patience and skill, Medill Corey had experimented with blood corpuscles and living body cells till he had ascertained the longest period over which the dead body could be left by its directing soul. He had found that the safe limit was approximately ten minutes. If the dragon-fly was not back on the dead man's right temple within ten minutes . . .

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A tremor ran through the dragon-fly's wings. This must be the last transition. Each one brought with it a terrible danger that the body might not be re-tenanted before the time-limit was up. Each one worked terrific hardship on a body already damaged by a dozen little deaths.

To die, and release the soul for escape into another living shell! That was sublime! But to use the somber discovery for the purpose of tricking a wife was monumental stupidity. Medill knew that; he admitted it even while he did it. After today some safer way must be found of breaking the spirit that had always maddened his egomania.

But now—hurry! Out to the gate, to spy on the meeting between Doctor Voight and Beatrice. Then her patient endurance could be further bruised by more quoting of what they had said and done when they thought they were alone. The most exquisite and refined torture, it was!

The wings of the dragon-fly were a mere blur as it hurtled through the summer afternoon.

Medill's house was set on more than an acre of land, mainly lawn. The gate was fifty yards from the house, and near it were no trees or shrubs of any kind—no shelter for eavesdroppers. The two would feel safe there.

The dragon-fly reached the gate on glittering wings just as Doctor Voight's old touring-car paused in the road outside. Beatrice was already there, waiting. She was leaning wearily against one of the gate-posts, her face pale and worn, her eyes closed.

Doctor Voight, a slender but stronglooking man with an iron-gray mustache and Vandyke beard, got from his car and stepped quickly to her side. He caught her right hand silently in his.

The dragon-fly, which had been hovering not far from Beatrice's head in the motionless way such insects have, darted forward with a whining of wings. Beatrice had not even opened her eyes at the hand-clasp, which indicated an infuriating communion of mind and spirit between her and the doctor.

"Darling," Doctor Voight said in a low tone, his eyes expressing infinite tenderness and sympathy.

At the word, Beatrice Corey opened her eyes quickly.

"Ssh! You mustn't say things like that. You must say nothing you would not want my husband to hear, because he hears everything we say."

Doctor Voight glanced around out of keen gray eyes.

"Nonsense, my dear. How could anybody be near enough to hear us in this spot?" His thin, strong fingers clasped hers more tightly. "You are letting your nerves run away with you."

"Am I? What would you say if I told you Medill had overheard us yesterday in the summer house?"

The doctor stared. "I would say it was impossible."

"Nevertheless, he did hear us." Beatrice leaned more wearily yet against the post. "A moment ago he mocked me by repeating, word for word, some of our talk together."

"The sneak! The contemptible spy! He has wired the summer house—" He broke off to wave his hand abstractedly at a large dragon-fly that had dashed erratically at his eyes.

"But he didn't," said Beatrice. "He swore there was nothing like that concealed here. And I believe him."

"Then, how—" muttered the doctor.

The dragon-fly had flown away from his face and was shimmering up and down in the golden air.

"Beatrice," said Doctor Voight, "you've got to get away from here. Medill Corey is a great man in the world of science, but in the world of human relations he is a monster. I have known his kind before; strong of will, but so narrow that they can't stand to have another strong will near them. Your will is strong, darling, but it will break before many days. I can see the break coming."

Beatrice sighed, and trembled a little.

"Pack your things and come with me," begged the doctor "You can stay with my sister till a divorce is arranged . . . What's wrong?"

"That thing!" exclaimed Beatrice. "That dragon-fly! It almost brushed my face."

The doctor smashed at the thing with his hat, but it retreated to a safe distance.

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"That is only one example of the wrong Corey is doing you," he declared quietly. "With your phobia against insects, you should never be made to live in a country house. Your place is in town. Corey knows that— and only keeps you here to torture you."

White-faced but resolute, Beatrice shook her head.

"I am going to stay with him. I married him for better or worse, and I meant the words."

"I admire your loyalty, but I think you're being unwise. You love me, don't you?"

"I—I can't—"

"Say it! You know you do. Give me the comfort of letting me hear you say it!"

Beatrice closed her eyes again. The dragon-fly darted very near, and hovered on almost invisible wings like a tiny, flying dagger.

"I love you," Beatrice whispered at last, with a sob in her voice. "There! But I must never say it again. I must never think it again—"

The dragon-fly darted in the direction of the distant house, paused to look backward out of its bulging eyes at the two by the gate, then went on.

"I love you."

The wings of the dragon-fly beat the air with a shrill, angry whine as it sped toward the hall window where was the hole in the screen.

"I love you."

So she had got to the point of admitting in words that she loved the man. She had said it! She, wife of a scientist brilliant beyond the comprehension of a dozen Doctor Voights! She would suffer for that.

THE many-faceted eyes of the dragon-fly brought out marvelous hues of red and blue in the grass and foliage which showed only uniform green to human eyes, but it did not see them. And it did not see other, less peaceful things . . .

Only pure reflex action, residing in the needle-like body apart from all intelligence, saved the dragon-fly. It made the shimmering creature stop as if it had hit a stone wall—just as a great featured lightning-bolt swooped with snapping beak at the spot

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where the dragon-fly would have been in another instant of sustained flight. A sparrow!

The dragon-fly darted toward the tree set at the rear of the Corey house. After it came the monster, wheeling as it wheeled, doubling back and from side to side as it did.

Fear, such as no human ever has occasion to know, gave added speed to the dragon-fly's wings. Insects live in a world of unspeakable nightmare. But in that world were few terrors more fearful than birds.

One last desperate rush the dragon-fly made. Then it folded its wings and dropped like a bullet to the lower branch of the tree, where it clung quaking to the under side of a leaf. The sparrow, huge as a Martin bomber, winged gigantically overhead for awhile, but finally flew away.

The next move of the dragon-fly was made more in frenzied haste than in wisdom. Hurry! Hurry! The time limit must be nearly up when it must light on the forehead of the corpse!

It dropped from the leaf, flashed into streaking flight—and plunged straight into a maze of sticky cables that looked to be made of rainbow-colored, flexible glass. A spider web!

The dragon-fly had fled in terror before. The emotion that now set its wings to vibrating in a shrill whine of futile power went beyond anything for which there are words.

Hurry Hurry! Another five minutes and it would be too late! It must get back to the pallid, chilling body in the workroom! And here it was tangled in this web of death stretching from twig to twig in the lower branch!

The keening of the dragon-fly's wings rose in pitch. But still its legs were held by the broken lengths of web. And now the wings themselves caught and smeared, clinging helplessly to the cables, sticking impotently to each other.

Abruptly, when every instinct and fiber shrieked for further struggle, the dragon-fly went moveless, feigning death. There was a way in which the study might yet be re-entered in time. It involved something undreamed of before—but there was a possibility . . .

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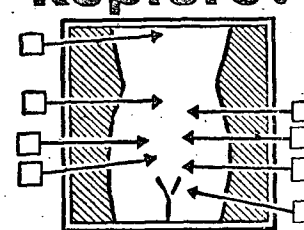

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wings and legs tangled and smeared, a broken travesty of the flashing bit of life it had been a moment before. And after a few seconds the web trembled a bit, though there was no breeze to shake its supporting branches.

A tremor ran through the iridescent wings. A short distance away was a great, hairy thing with deadly eyes and powerful, hairy legs. A nightmare thing—the spider that had engineered this web.

The web trembled yet more as the bloated body was sent closer on crooked legs toward its enmeshed prey. And the dragon-fly could only hang there and stare, with a myriad magnifying lenses, at the horror approaching it.

The spider reached the dragon-fly and crouched beside it for an instant as if gloating over its helplessness. Then, with incredible swiftness, it pounced.

The dragon-fly felt terrific pain—felt death. But even in that flashing instant it felt, too, terrific triumph. For the spider, in taking life, was losing existence! Death, it seemed, could release the soul in another body whether the death were accidental or deliberately willed by a stopped heart!

The hairy, revolting body of the spider was propelled by its crooked, powerful legs down the tree trunk and through the towering jungle of the lawn to the wall of the house. Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Perhaps even now it was too late. But by a last burst of speed the study might be reached in time.

AT THE white wall of the house the spider paused. Great white expanse stretching up to heaven before the dull but vicious eyes . . . distance too great to make windows even visible, let alone identifiable . . . how in the name of heaven could the hall window, with the priceless hole in the screen, be found?

The spider started clambering up the wall at random, each clapboard presenting a gigantic problem in navigation, each fluttering web of other spiders a trap to be meticulously avoided. Any further delay would assuredly be fatal. A fight with another spider, no matter how brief, would definitely kill the last trace of a hope already slim.

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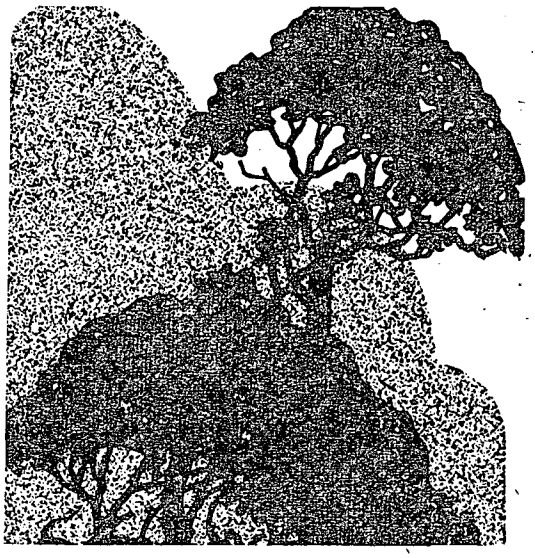
Speed! Speed!

Here was a window, partly opened. And the screen . . .

The spider scuttled back and forth and up and down. There was no hole. This was not the window.



But through the screen the staring eyes of the spider saw something that froze it stone-still for an instant. A wide table, with an armchair set before it. A dead man in the chair. Beyond, a door broken from its hinges; and a man and woman hurrying toward the corpse.

The spider's legs blurred with the rapidity of their action. The hairy body left the surface of the screen and darted along its upper edge. At one end the frame was warped away from the window-sash a little. A very little!

No true spider would have forced itself through such a narrow crack. But this one did, crushing body and legs, almost scraping one eye out, but eventually landing heavily on the inside of the window-sill. From there the spider dropped to the floor and scuttled painfully on trailing legs to the armchair.

"He's dead," Doctor Voight was saying, as he leaned over the stark body. "Your slavery is ended, Beatrice."

"Dead?" whispered the woman. "Dead! Oh, thank God!"

The task of hoisting its heavy body up the chair-leg and up along the sleeve of the dead man seemed surely beyond the power of the shattered spider. But at the woman's words a shiver seemed to go through it; and the trailing legs began tortuously lifting its bulk.

Dead, eh? And Beatrice thanked God for it! Well, Doctor Voight would have the surprise of his professional life in a moment! For the spider was up on the chair-arm now, still unnoticed; and the immense disk of the watch, propped on the desk, was visible. Only twelve minutes had passed since the dragon-fly had left the room. It had seemed far longer than that.

Only twelve minutes! The corpse could still almost certainly come to life. Once let the hairy, bloated body come to rest on the dead forehead and Beatrice would see how much God was to be thanked!

The spider climbed the dead man's coat-sleeve. It went faster now. Much faster. The rough fabric offered swifter footing than the smooth chair-leg.

"It must have been heart failure," the doctor was saying. "His heart and circulatory system were in bad shape—though I'm ashamed to say I couldn't find exactly what was wrong. His trouble baffled diagnosis."

The spider raced over the dead man's shoulder. The wide white strip of the starched collar, and the gray expanse of the dead cheek, loomed just above it.

"Anyhow, he's dead," Doctor Voight went on. "And you are at last going to live a sane, healthy life. A happy one, too, I hope—with me?"

"So happy!" murmured Beatrice. "So very happy! I should be sorry . . . for this." She nodded toward the corpse. "But I can't be—not and be honest. You don't know a tenth of the things he did to me. I was afraid to let you know, afraid you would kill him."

THE spider skimmed up the dead gray cheek.

Making love literally over a dead man! Mouthing sweet nothings with death in the room! Let them look out when the dead man came to life! Beatrice especially. She'd wish she had never been born! There were ways, without ever a hand being touched to them,

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of making persons into stark lunatics in a few months. The author of Will to Power over the Involuntary Muscles knew such ways.

The spider raced down into the hollowed eyesocket, up again, and around the tangle of the eyelashes.

"We'll travel awhile till you forget this house of cruelty and tragedy," the doctor said. "And then we'll come back to normality and work. Unless you'd rather we moved to some other town?"

"No, your practice is here."

The spider skirted around the bushy eyebrow sprouting from the clammy skin. The goal was only a few inches away. Thank God he's dead, eh? She'd be praying God for her own death, soon!

"You do love me, Beatrice?" said the doctor, his fine eyes looking deep into hers.

"With all my heart . . . Oh—look—smash it!"

The spider reached the chill forehead just as Doctor Voight, smiling a little at Beatrice's fear, brushed it off.

It plopped on the table top. In an instant it was scurrying frantically back toward the dead body.

"Kill it! Kill it!" beseeched Beatrice. "Loathsome, hairy thing!"

Doctor Voight raised the book, Will to Power, and poised it above the toiling spider. And the spider stopped!

Yes, yes, yes! Kill it! For once again death could release the spirit that otherwise could return to its human shell only by actual contact with the right temple. When that book came crashing down, the dead would live again!

But Doctor Voight, with a laugh, tossed the book aside. "It would make a mess on the table top," he said.

He slid a piece of paper under the spider, carried it to the window, raised the screen and dropped it carelessly out.

In the jungle of the lawn, the pulped and broken spider stared dully up at the white expanse of the house wall, which seemed to stretch to heaven. Impossible to scale that wall again. Impossible . . .

The spider twitched spasmodically, and lay still.

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The Eyrie

(Continued from page 4)

secutive paragraphs of description are all considered "corny." A magazine devoted to fantasy is launched and before you know it the Stf boys have taken over. Like the desert episode, the camel is soon inside the tent and the rightful occupant is out in the cold.

WEIRD TALES, *thank the gods, is still a fantasy magazine, much along the same lines as in the late 20's. Many of the old masters are gone, but if C. A. Smith is still available, I wish you could prevail upon him for a few more stories.* Fantasy fiction desperately needs his tales.*

I read, collect and like Stf., and have no quarrel with its followers, since I include myself among them. Fantasy, however, has always been my first love, and I therefore beseech you to keep WEIRD TALES *true to its name, at the same time hoping that the readers will support* WT *in a better manner than which it seems to have become accustomed.*

My apologies for the length of this discussion. I seldom write fan letters, but find it difficult to stop once under way.

James C. Tibbetts
Leavenworth, Kansas

*—See page 41 in this issue. Editor WEIRD TALES.

COMMENT AND COMPLIMENT

AS ONE author to several others—and an editor—we were very pleased to receive the following letter. Everil Worrell has been often in WEIRD TALES—her latest story was in our January issue of this year, and there is a comment on it in a letter in this department. She will have another witch story in an early issue, and in the meantime has said this, mostly about our March number:

First, I want to compliment you on a wonderful number. I like to see so much new material—with the one wonderful reprint, and certainly "The Supreme Witch" is. Then, the stories—this is a high showing of stories that are not only interesting, but that are really writing, really literature. "Slime" is terrific—I believe I've always wanted to read something cosmic and spatial about those dark ocean depth potentials. "Night Court" is—well, for one thing it is Mary Elizabeth Counselman, and that is saying enough. "The Raft" achieves an atmosphere in the stark, simple, graphical narration of the famous Waltari novel "The Egyptian"—a book I simply ate up. I greatly liked "The Dream Merchant," I liked "The Talkie Dolls"—and enjoyed the rest too. And I liked the lack of formula and the variety.

Transitionally to my next remarks, I like Lovecraft but I've been interested in the Lovecraft controversy, because I somewhat agree with his detractors—I found Joseph C. Wenk of Toronto particularly literate in his assessment. He's done some other reading and he knows something of literary points, doesn't he? When my husband was living, we used to use some of the great Lovecraft vocabulary around the house

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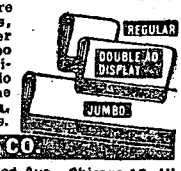

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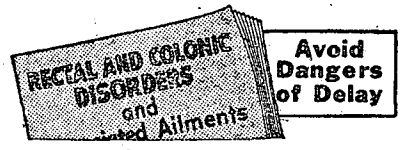

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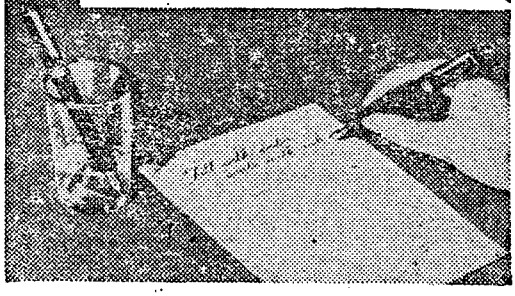

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rather freely. If something particularly smelly boiled over in the kitchen we might refer to it as a "foul mephitic vapor," and when the baby howled, we might invite one another to do something about the "horrific ululations." I kinda think I know what Wenk meant when he said it wasn't so much what Lovecraft did, as how he did it!

Everil Worrell
Washington, D. C.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES *since it first appeared in print.*

The authors have always been able to hold the readers' interest by producing stories that are completely weird or at least very unusual. One cannot say that any certain author is better or worse than another, because in times past they have all produced masterpieces which have not been excelled by any of the old timers of long ago.

There is one style which I admire above all others—a style in which the tempo rises rather slowly at first, increasing as the story continues and suddenly leaping to an exploding climax in which the reader receives the full impact in the form of a frightful revelation.

Several authors use this style in part. H.P.L. uses it in full and that is the reason for his great success.

The best tales are those with a minimum of conversation and a great amount of description, also the subject concerning unusual people in strange places in times remote to us.

The following are stories that I consider tops among those you have printed:

"Floral Tribute" . . . . . Bloch
"The Churchyard Yew" . . . . . Le Fanu
"The Statement of Randolph Carter" . . . . . H.P.L.
"The Night Road" . . . . . Derleth
"The Brides of Baxter Creek" . . . . . Barr
"The Ghost Walk" . . . . . Grendon
"Clay" . . . . . Thompson
"Black Ferris" . . . . . Bradbury

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There are many others too numerous to mention.

Paul Pies
Terre Haute, Indiana

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Re: Jan. '53 issue

Most disturbing: I open same to page 10, and what do I perceive?

W O W!

Certain local fans, including the writer, hereby nominate the model for said drawing as the girl whom we'd most like to be bewitched by!

Concerning the balance of said issue, I have nothing but praise, and am in complete accord with the phraseology of one contributor to "The Eyrie," viz. Louise Behrens who cites "the fresh, novel ideas in some of the stories." Definitely does this apply to "Once There Was A Little Girl." Isn't it comforting to realize that "unusual" people might be perfectly delightful to know and work with? Uh-huh, particularly if one of them does resemble Eberle's drawing! G-r-r-ruff!

I was most interested in "The Phantom Soldier," the composition of which stamps the narrator as (a) relating an incident ipso facto; or (b) concocting an unusually presented bit of trivia. Which is correct? It bears the mark of non-fiction.

Covering the remainder, without particularizing, the other stories were good; with one final passing phrase, reiterating my previous kudos for Suzanne Pickett ("I Can't Wear White").

D. R. Naugle
Seattle, Washington

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Certainly was glad to see that the March issue of WT contained three Finlay illustrations. Finlay is ideally suited to WT, he is able to bring to life the very essence of terror and evil which your authors strive to attain in their stories.

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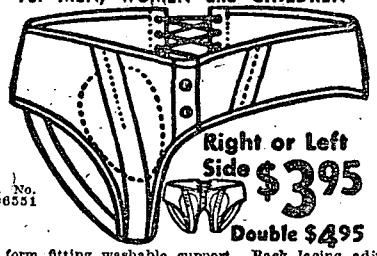

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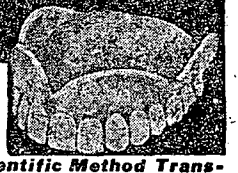

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• WEIRD TALES •

In contrast to your usual policy you had only one reprint this issue, although the reprints have been of a high quality I believe that most readers prefer new material.

Personally I enjoyed "The Raft" possibly more than any other story. Mr. Shaw is apparently a gifted new writer. "Slime" was also very much in the spirit of WT.

I agree with Dave Hammond . . . let's have some fiction from the able Seabury Quinn. I'd also like to register a plea for Clark A. Smith, Edmond Hamilton, Cleve Cartmill and August Derleth.

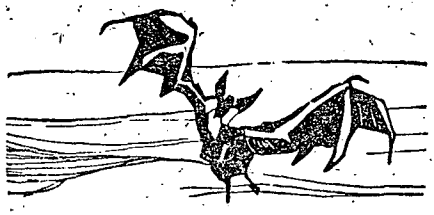
Paul Mittelbuscher
Sweet Springs, Missouri

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I have been reading WEIRD TALES *for many years. It takes one out of the humdrum of every day life, and it does not have any of that horrid science fiction: Some people like science-fiction stories, but I am one who does not.*

I always read The Eyrie section of the magazine, and really enjoy it.

Mrs. George L. Brown
Whiteboro, New York



We get so many letters from readers who would like to sell or exchange old copies of WEIRD TALES, that it seems as if we should start a column of their offerings and desires. Has anyone any suggestions as to how it could be the most use? One thing the writers all stress is that they don't want to pay very high prices for ancient copies. We might even invest in some ourselves; our stock of old issues is very low.—Editor, WEIRD TALES.

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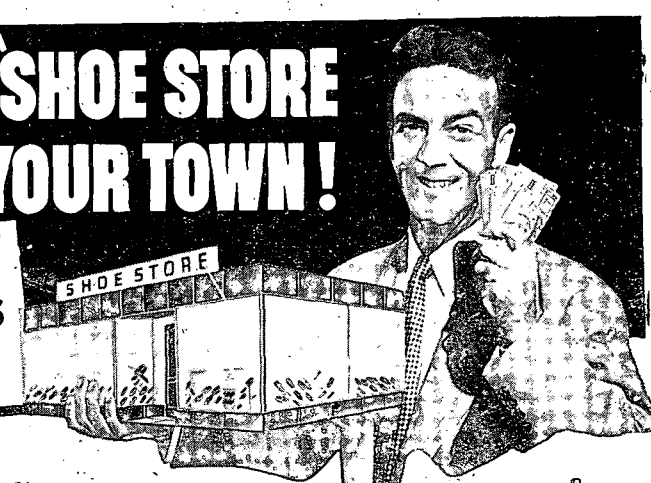
RUN THE BEST "SHOE STORE BUSINESS" IN YOUR TOWN!



Not Just Shoes... But SPECIAL KINDS OF SHOES!

Big Full or Spare Time Profits!

Satisfy Customers Most Stores Are Not Able to Take Care Of!

HERE'S THE BUSINESS YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED! YEAR 'ROUND — REPEAT ORDERS FROM FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, EVERYBODY — STEADY PROFITS — UNLIMITED PROSPECTS—A QUALITY PRODUCT THAT'S NATIONALLY KNOWN! Start full or spare time with a "shoe store business" in your pocket. No expense of overhead, lights, etc. . . . your big profit is ALL YOURS!

We set you up in this fine business FREE. See how easy it is to make BIG MONEY with Mason's new "Wonder Line" of shoes for men and women. Wonderful style, extra-comfort features; amazing range of sizes and widths. You feature over 150 styles of dress, sport and work shoes. Sizes from 5 to 16, widths AAAA to EEEE. No wonder no shoe store in your town can compare with you!

Make hundreds of *extra* dollars every month by selling *specially designed* Mason air-cushioned service shoes to filling station attendants, garage men, postmen, truck drivers, grocers, other people who work in stores, offices, industries. Watch your customer list grow—see how easy it is to earn exciting profits when customers RE-ORDER from you.

STEEL SAFETY TOE SHOES!

The last word in foot safety! You feature Steel Safety Toe Shoes in many good-looking styles. Workers want to save feet from injury. Safety Toe shoes help do the job — put EXTRA dollars into your bank account!

OUTSTANDING LEATHERS!

Imported Australian Kangaroo leather. Calf-skin — lustrous, Shell Cordovan — Rugged Horsehide—actual shoe-samples of these fine quality leathers furnished FREE to qualified men!

NEOPRENE and GRO-CORK SOLES and HEELS!

Work shoes have special features for different occupations: Oil-resistant Du-Pont Neoprene soles; heels, Gro-Cork Slip-Resistant soles, heels wanted by service station men, garage men, factory workers, thousands in other occupations—help make shoes so fast-selling!

AIR-CUSHION COMFORT!

Foamy-soft Air-Cushion innersole cushions feet on thousands of air bubbles. Customers rave about comfort of "walking on air"! You get actual Air-Cushion demonstrator. Just say "Feel that Cushion." When customers do — they buy!

EXCLUSIVE FEATURES SELL MASON SHOES QUICKLY FOR YOU!

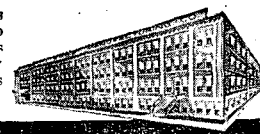
Mason Shoes are nationally known for extra comfort features. Just hand prospects your Cut-away 10-second Air Cushion Demonstrator. When they feel the foamy-soft, heel-to-toe Velvet-eez Air Cushion they realize how wonderfully comfortable it is to "Walk on air!" Then point out the sturdy steel shank for extra strength, plus special Air Cushion Arch Support. Mason Velvet-eez shoes are the only footwear sold direct that bears the famed Good Housekeeping Guarantee Seal. Because these fine shoes are NOT sold in stores, people must buy from YOU!

WE START YOU ON THE WAY TO EXCITING PROFITS FREE!

No need to invest a cent, ever. We send you our Powerful Selling Outfit that has proved to be a real money-maker for so many thousands of men—absolutely FREE! We back you up with National Advertising, proved Sales Aids, even MORE, as soon as you show us you are really interested in making BIG MONEY.

"TERRIFIC INCOME!"

Edward McCarty of Illinois says: "The day I started to sell Mason Velvet-eez shoes was the luckiest day of my life! My income now is simply terrific!"



SEND TODAY . . . Start Your Own Profitable Business RIGHT AWAY!

DO YOU want to make steady EXTRA money? Do you want *real security?* Do you want to be able to afford the things you've always only dreamed about?—then send this coupon TODAY! We will rush your powerful Free Selling Outfit that features over 150 fast-selling Mason Shoe styles for men and women—Air-Cushion Demonstrator, How-To-Make-Money Booklet, *everything* you need to make money from the first hour!

SEND COUPON FOR FREE OUTFIT!

Mr. Ned Mason, Dept. MA-125
Mason Shoe Mfg. Co.
Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

I want to make really BIG MONEY with Mason shoes! Rush my FREE Selling Outfit so I can start running the best "Shoe Store Business" in my town.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.
Dept. MA-125
Chippewa Falls
Wisconsin

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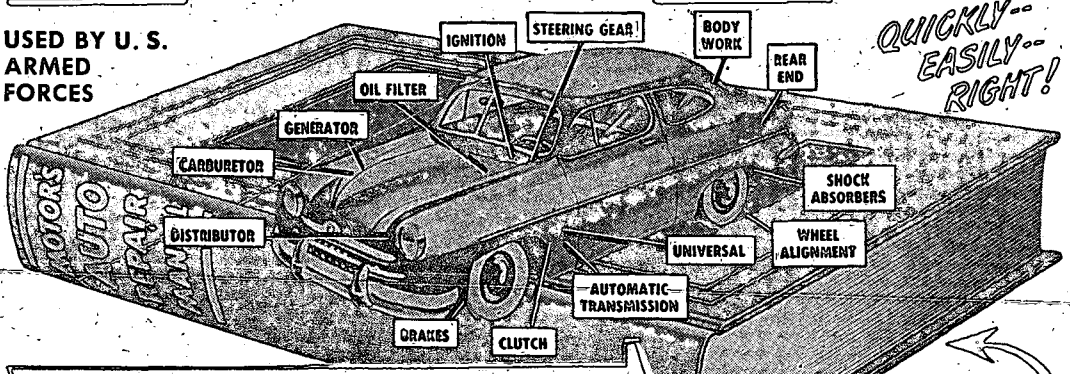

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